THIS BOOK IS FOR ADULT READERS

This is not a limitation of use,
merely an identification of reader interest.

Fiction 79062
A Z
Cop

LIT/LANG

LITERAT LANGUAGE

ILLINOIS STATE LIBRARY
SPRINGFIELD

CHARLES F. CARPENTIER
*Secretary of State and State Librarian*

R00205 49901

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY
HAROLD WASHINGTON LIBRARY CE

R0020549901

Date Due

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| NOV 28 | | | |
| May 4 | | | |
| | | | |
| JAN 27. | | | |
| JAN 7 | | | |
| APR 20 '55 | | | |
| SEP 9 '59 | | | |
| | | | |
| APR 30 '63 | | | |
| NOV 6 '63 | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

# Success

*A NOVEL*

BY

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

**Author of "The Clarion," "Common Cause," etc.**

79062

Boston and New York
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1921

COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY THE PICTORIAL REVIEW COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

H.C.

U17
Fiction
Cop. 6
5316
351

# CONTENTS

PART I. ENCHANTMENT 1

PART II. THE VISION 153

PART III. FULFILLMENT 349

A217su
Cop. 6

Fiction
Cop. 6

# SUCCESS

## PART I

### ENCHANTMENT

THIS BOOK IS FOR ADULT READERS.

# SUCCESS

∴

## PART I

### ENCHANTMENT

### CHAPTER I

THE lonely station of Manzanita stood out, sharp and unsightly, in the keen February sunlight. A mile away in a dip of the desert, lay the town, a sorry sprawl of frame buildings, patternless save for the one main street, which promptly lost itself at either end in a maze of cholla, prickly pear, and the lovely, golden-glowing roseo. Far as the eye could see, the waste was spangled with vivid hues, for the rare rains had come, and all the cacti were in joyous bloom, from the scarlet stain of the ocatilla to the pale, dream-flower of the yucca. Overhead the sky shone with a hard serenity, a blue, enameled dome through which the imperishable fires seemed magnified as they limned sharp shadows on the earth; but in the southwest clouds massed and lurked darkly for a sign that the storm had but called a truce.

East to west, along a ridge bounding the lower desert, ran the railroad, a line as harshly uncompromising as the cold mathematics of the engineers who had mapped it. To the north spread unfathomably a forest of scrub pine and piñon, rising, here and there, into loftier growth. It was as if man, with his imperious interventions, had set those thin steel parallels as an irrefragable boundary to the mutual encroachments of forest and desert, tree and cactus. A single, straggling trail squirmed its way into the woodland. One might have surmised that it was winding hopefully if blindly toward the noble mountain peak shimmering in white splendor, mystic and wonderful, sixty miles away, but seeming in that lucent air to be brooding closely over all the varied loveliness below.

Though nine o'clock had struck on the brisk little station-

clock, there was still a tang of night chill left. The station-agent came out, carrying a chair which he set down in the sunniest corner of the platform. He looked to be hardly more than a boy, but firm-knit and self-confident. His features were regular, his fairish hair slightly wavy, and in his expression there was a curious and incongruous suggestion of settledness, of acceptance, of satisfaction with life as he met it, which an observer of men would have found difficult to reconcile with his youth and the obvious intelligence of the face. His eyes were masked by deeply browned glasses, for he was bent upon literary pursuits, witness the corpulent, paper-covered volume under his arm. Adjusting his chair to the angle of ease, he tipped back against the wall and made tentative entry into his book.

What a monumental work was that in the treasure-filled recesses of which the young explorer was straightway lost to the outer world! No human need but might find its contentment therein. Spread forth in its alluringly illustrated pages was the whole universe reduced to the purchasable. It was a perfect and detailed microcosm of the world of trade, the cosmogony of commerce *in petto*. The style was brief, pithy, pregnant; the illustrations — oh, wonder of wonders! — unfailingly apt to the text. He who sat by the Damascus Road of old marveling as the caravans rolled dustily past bearing "emeralds and wheat, honey and oil and balm, fine linen and embroidered goods, iron, cassia and calamus, white wool, ivory and ebony," beheld or conjectured no such wondrous offerings as were here gathered, collected, and presented for the patronage of this heir of all the ages, between the gay-hued covers of the great Sears-Roebuck Semiannual Mail-Order Catalogue. Its happy possessor need but cross the talisman with the ready magic of a postal money order and the swift genii of transportation would attend, servile to his call, to deliver the commanded treasures at his very door.

But the young reader was not purposefully shopping in this vast market-place of print. Rather he was adventuring idly, indulging the amateur spirit, playing a game of hit-or-miss, seeking oracles in those teeming pages. Therefore he did not turn to the pink insert, embodying the alphabetical catalogue (Abdominal Bands to Zither Strings), but opened at random.

"Supertoned Banjos," he read, beginning at the heading; and, running his eye down the different varieties, paused at "Pride of the Plantation, a full-sized, well-made, snappy-toned instrument at a very moderate price. 12 T 4031/4."

The explorer shook his head. Abovestairs rested a guitar (the Pearletta, 12 S 206, price $7.95) which he had purchased at the instance of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck's insinuating representation as set forth in catalogue item 12 S 01942, "Self-mastery of the Guitar in One Book, with All Chords, Also Popular Solos That Can Be Played Almost at Sight." The nineteen-cent instruction-book had gone into the fire after three days of unequal combat between it and its owner, and the latter had subsequently learned something of the guitar (and more of life) from a Mexican-American girl with lazy eyes and the soul of a capricious and self-indulged kitten, who had come uninvited to Manzanita to visit an aunt, deceased six months previously. With a mild pang of memory for those dreamy, music-filled nights on the desert, the youth decided against further experiments in stringed orchestration.

Telescopes turned up next. He lingered a moment over 20 T 3513, a nickel-plated cap pocket-glass, reflecting that with it he could discern any signal on the distant wooded butte occupied by Miss Camilla Van Arsdale, back on the forest trail, in the event that she might wish a wire sent or any other service performed. Miss Camilla had been very kind and understanding at the time of the parting with Carlotta, albeit with a grimly humorous disapproval of the whole inflammatory affair; as well as at other times; and there was nothing that he would not do for her. He made a neat entry in a pocket ledger (3 T 9901) against the time when he should have spare cash, and essayed another plunge.

Arctics and Lumberman's Overs he passed by with a grin as inappropriate to the climate. Cod Liver Oil failed to interest him, as did the Provident Cast Iron Range and the Clean-Press Cider Mill. But he paused speculatively before Punching Bags, for he had the clean pride of body, typical of lusty Western youth, and loved all forms of exercise. Could he find space, he wondered, to install 6 T 1441 with its Scientific Noiseless Plat-

form & Wall Attachment (6 T 1476) in the portable house (55 S 17) which, purchased a year before, now stood in the clearing behind the station crammed with purchases from the Sears-Roebuck wonderbook. Anyway, he would make another note of it. What would it be like, he wondered, to have a million dollars to spend, and unlimited access to the Sears-Roebuck treasures. Picturing himself as such a Crœsus, he innocently thought that his first act would be to take train for Chicago and inspect the warehoused accumulations of those princes of trade with his own eager eyes!

He mused humorously for a moment over a book on "Ease in Conversation." ("No trouble about conversation," he reflected; "the difficulty is to find anybody to converse with," and he thought first of Carlotta, and then of Miss Camilla Van Arsdale, but chiefly of the latter, for conversation had not been the strong point of the passionate, light-hearted Spanish girl.) Upon a volume kindly offering to teach astronomy to the lay mind without effort or trouble (43 T 790) and manifestly cheap at $1.10, he bestowed a more respectful attention, for the desert nights were long and lonely.

Eventually he arrived at the department appropriate to his age and the almost universal ambition of the civilized male, to wit, clothing. Deeply, judiciously, did he meditate and weigh the advantages as between 745 J 460 ("Something new — different — economical — efficient. An all-wool suit embodying all the features that make for clothes satisfaction. This announcement is of tremendous importance" — as one might well have inferred from the student's rapt expression) and 776 J 017 ("A double-breasted, snappy, yet semi-conservative effect in dark-green worsted, a special social value"), leaning to the latter because of a purely literary response to that subtle and deft appeal of the attributive "social." The devotee of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck was an innately social person, though as yet his gregarious proclivities lay undeveloped and unsuspected by himself. Also he was of a literary tendency; but of this he was already self-conscious. He passed on to ulsters and raincoats, divagated into the colorful realm of neckwear, debated scarf-

pins and cuff-links, visualized patterned shirtings, and emerged to dream of composite sartorial grandeurs which, duly synthesized into a long list of hopeful entries, were duly filed away within the pages of 3 T 9901, the pocket ledger.

Footsteps shuffling along the right of way dispelled his visions. He looked up to see two pedestrians who halted at his movement. They were paired typically of that strange fraternity, the hobo, one being a grizzled, hard-bitten man of waning middle age, the other a vicious and scrawny boy of eighteen or so. The boy spoke first.

"You the main guy here?"

The agent nodded.

"Got a sore throat?" demanded the boy surlily. He started toward the door. The agent made no move, but his eyes were attentive.

"That'll be near enough," he said quietly.

"Oh, we ain't on that lay," put in the grizzled man. He was quite hoarse. "You needn't to be scared of us."

"I'm not," agreed the agent. And, indeed, the fact was self-evident.

"What about the pueblo yonder?" asked the man with a jerk of his head toward the town.

"The hoosegow is old and the sheriff is new."

"I got ya," said the man, nodding. "We better be on our way."

"I would think so."

"You're a hell of a guy, you are," whined the boy. "'On yer way' from you an' not so much as 'Are you hungry?' What about a little hand-out?"

"Nothing doing."

"Tightwad! How'd you like —"

"If you're hungry, feel in your coat-pocket."

"I guess you're a wise one," put in the man, grinning appreciatively. "We got grub enough. Panhandlin's a habit with the kid; don't come natural to him to pass a likely prospect without makin' a touch."

He leaned against the platform, raising one foot slightly from

the ground in the manner of a limping animal. The agent disappeared into the station, locking the door after him. The boy gave expression to a violent obscenity directed upon the vanished man. When that individual emerged again, he handed the grizzled man a box of ointment and tossed a packet of tobacco to the evil-faced boy. Both were quick with their thanks. That which they had most needed and desired had been, as it were, spontaneously provided. But the elder of the wayfarers was puzzled, and looked from the salve-box to its giver.

"How'd you know my feet was blistered?"

"Been padding in the rain, haven't you?"

"Have you been on the hoof, too?" asked the hobo quickly. The other smiled.

"Say!" exclaimed the boy. "I bet he's Banneker. Are you?" he demanded.

"That's my name."

"I heard of you three years ago when you was down on the Long Line Sandy," said the man. He paused and considered. "What's your lay, Mr. Banneker?" he asked, curiously but respectfully.

"As you see it. Railroading."

"A gay-cat," put in the boy with a touch of scorn.

"You hold your fresh lip," his elder rebuked him. "This gent has treated us *like* a gent. But why? What's the idea? That's what I don't get."

"Oh, some day I might want to run for Governor on the hobo ticket," returned the unsmiling agent.

"You get our votes. Well, so long and much obliged."

The two resumed their journey. Banneker returned to his book. A freight, "running extra," interrupted him, but not for long. The wire had been practicing a seemly restraint for uneventful weeks, so the agent felt that he could settle down to a sure hour's bookishness yet, even though the west-bound Transcontinental Special should be on time, which was improbable, as "bad track" had been reported from eastward, owing to the rains. Rather to his surprise, he had hardly got well reimmersed in the enchantments of the mercantile fairyland when the "Open Office" wire warned him to be attentive, and pres-

ently from the east came tidings of Number Three running almost true to schedule, as befitted the pride of the line, the finest train that crossed the continent.

Past the gaunt station she roared, only seven minutes late, giving the imaginative young official a glimpse and flash of the uttermost luxury of travel: rich woods, gleaming metal, elegance of finish, and on the rear of the observation-car a group so lily-clad that Sears-Roebuck at its most glorious was not like unto them. Would such a train, the implanted youth wondered, ever bear him away to unknown, undreamed enchantments?

Would he even wish to go if he might? Life was full of many things to do and learn at Manzanita. Mahomet need not go to the mountain when, with but a mustard seed of faith in the proven potency of mail-order miracles he could move mountains to come to him. Leaning to his telegraph instrument, he wired to the agent at Stanwood, twenty-six miles down-line, his formal announcement.

"O. S. — G. I. No. 3 by at 10.46."

"O. K. — D. S.," came the response.

Banneker returned to the sunlight. In seven minutes or perhaps less, as the Transcontinental would be straining to make up lost time, the train would enter Rock Cut three miles and more west, and he would recapture the powerful throbbing of the locomotive as she emerged on the farther side, having conquered the worst of the grade.

Banneker waited. He drew out his watch. Seven. Seven and a half. Eight. No sound from westward. He frowned. Like most of the road's employees, he took a special and almost personal interest in having the regal train on time, as if, in dispatching it through, he had given it a friendly push on its swift and mighty mission. Was she steaming badly? There had been no sign of it as she passed. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the brakes. Or could the track have —

The agent tilted sharply forward, his lithe frame tense. A long-drawn, quivering shriek came down-wind to him. It was repeated. Then short and sharp, piercing note on piercing note, sounded the shrill, clamant voice.

The great engine of Number Three was yelling for help.

## Chapter II

Banneker came out of his chair with a spring.

"Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!" screamed the strident voice.

It was like an animal in pain and panic.

For a brief instant the station-agent halted at the door to assure himself that the call was stationary. It was. Also it was slightly muffled. That meant that the train was still in the cut. As he ran to the key and sent in the signal for Stanwood, Banneker reflected what this might mean. Crippled? Likely enough. Ditched? He guessed not. A ditched locomotive is usually voiceless if not driverless as well. Blocked by a slide? Rock Cut had a bad repute for that kind of accident. But the quality of the call predicated more of a catastrophe than a mere blockade. Besides, in that case why could not the train back down —

The answering signal from the dispatcher at Stanwood interrupted his conjectures.

"Number Three in trouble in the Cut," ticked Banneker fluently. "Think help probably needed from you. Shall I go out?"

"O. K.," came the answer. "Take charge. Bad track reported three miles east may delay arrival."

Banneker dropped and locked the windows, set his signal for "track blocked" and ran to the portable house. Inside he stood, considering. With swift precision he took from one of the home-carpentered shelves a compact emergency kit, 17 S 4230, "hefted" it, and adjusted it, knapsack fashion, to his back; then from a small cabinet drew a flask, which he disposed in his hip-pocket. Another part of the same cabinet provided a first-aid outfit, 3 R 0114. Thus equipped he was just closing the door after him when another thought struck him and he returned to slip a coil of light, strong sash-cord, 36 J 9078, over his shoulders to his waist where he deftly tautened it. He had seen railroad wrecks before. For a moment he considered leaving his coat, for he had upwards of three miles to go in the increasing heat;

but, reflecting that the outward and visible signs of authority might save time and questions, he thought better of it. Patting his pocket to make sure that his necessary notebook and pencil were there, he set out at a moderate, even, springless lope. He had no mind to reach a scene which might require his best qualities of mind and body, in a semi-exhausted state. Nevertheless, laden as he was, he made the three miles in less than half an hour. Let no man who has not tried to cover at speed the ribbed treacheries of a railroad track minimize the achievement!

A sharp curve leads to the entrance of Rock Cut. Running easily, Banneker had reached the beginning of the turn, when he became aware of a lumbering figure approaching him at a high and wild sort of half-gallop. The man's face was a welter of blood. One hand was pressed to it. The other swung crazily as he ran. He would have swept past Banneker unregarding had not the agent caught him by the shoulder.

"Where are you hurt?"

The runner stared wildly at the young man. "I'll soom," he mumbled breathlessly, his hand still crumpled against the dreadfully smeared face. "Dammum, I'll soom."

He removed his hand from his mouth, and the red drops splattered and were lost upon the glittering, thirsty sand. Banneker wiped the man's face, and found no injury. But the fingers which he had crammed into his mouth were bleeding profusely.

"They oughta be prosecuted," moaned the sufferer. "*I*'ll soom. For ten thousan' dollars. M'hand is smashed. Looka that! Smashed like a bug."

Banneker caught the hand and expertly bound it, taking the man's name and address as he worked.

"Is it a bad wreck?" he asked.

"It's hell. Look at m'hand! But I'll soom, all right. *I*'ll show'm.... Oh!... Cars are afire, too.... Oh-h-h! Where's a hospital?"

He cursed weakly as Banneker, without answering, re-stowed his packet and ran on.

A thin wisp of smoke rising above the nearer wall of rocks

made the agent set his teeth. Throughout his course the voice of the engine had, as it were, yapped at his hurrying heels, but now it was silent, and he could hear a murmur of voices and an occasional shouted order. He came into sight of the accident, to face a bewildering scene.

Two hundred yards up the track stood the major portion of the train, intact. Behind it, by itself, lay a Pullman sleeper, on its side and apparently little harmed. Nearest to Banneker, partly on the rails but mainly beside them, was jumbled a ridiculous mess of woodwork, with here and there a gleam of metal, centering on a large and jagged boulder. Smaller rocks were scattered through the *mêlange*. It was exactly like a heap of giant jackstraws into which some mischievous spirit had tossed a large pebble. At one end a flame sputtered and spread cheerfully.

A panting and grimy conductor staggered toward it with a pail of water from the engine. Banneker accosted him.

"Any one in —"

"Get outa my way!" gasped the official.

"I'm agent at Manzanita."

The conductor set down his pail. "O God!" he said. "Did you bring any help?"

"No, I'm alone. Any one in there?" He pointed to the flaming débris.

"One that we know of. He's dead."

"Sure?" cried Banneker sharply.

"Look for yourself. Go the other side."

Banneker looked and returned, white and set of face. "How many others?"

"Seven, so far."

"Is that all?" asked the agent with a sense of relief. It seemed as if no occupant could have come forth of that ghastly and absurd rubbish-heap, which had been two luxurious Pullmans, alive.

"There's a dozen that's hurt bad."

"No use watering that mess," said Banneker. "It won't burn much further. Wind's against it. Anybody left in the other smashed cars?"

"Don't think so."

"Got the names of the dead?"

"Now, how would I have the time!" demanded the conductor resentfully.

Banneker turned to the far side of the track where the seven bodies lay. They were not disposed decorously. The faces were uncovered. The postures were crumpled and grotesque. A forgotten corner of a battle-field might look like that, the young agent thought, bloody and disordered and casual.

Nearest him was the body of a woman badly crushed, and, crouching beside it, a man who fondled one of its hands, weeping quietly. Close by lay the corpse of a child showing no wound or mark, and next that, something so mangled that it might have been either man or woman — or neither. The other victims were humped or sprawled upon the sand in postures of exaggerated *abandon;* all but one, a blonde young girl whose upthrust arm seemed to be reaching for something just beyond her grasp.

A group of the uninjured from the forward cars surrounded and enclosed a confused sound of moaning and crying. Banneker pushed briskly through the ring. About twenty wounded lay upon the ground or were propped against the rock-wall. Over them two women were expertly working, one tiny and beautiful, with jewels gleaming on her reddened hands; the other brisk, homely, with a suggestion of the professional in her precise motions. A broad, fat, white-bearded man seemed to be informally in charge. At least he was giving directions in a growling voice as he bent over the sufferers. Banneker went to him.

"Doctor?" he inquired.

The other did not even look up. "Don't bother me," he snapped.

The station-agent pushed his first-aid packet into the old man's hands.

"Good!" grunted the other. "Hold this fellow's head, will you? Hold it hard."

Banneker's wrists were props of steel as he gripped the tossing head. The old man took a turn with a bandage and fastened it.

"He'll die, anyway," he said, and lifted his face.

Banneker cackled like a silly girl at full sight of him. The spreading whisker on the far side of his stern face was gayly pied in blotches of red and green.

"Going to have hysterics?" demanded the old man, striking not so far short of the truth.

"No," said the agent, mastering himself. "Hey! you, trainman," he called to a hobbling, blue-coated fellow. "Bring two buckets of water from the boiler-tap, hot and clean. Clean, mind you!" The man nodded and limped away. "Anything else, Doctor?" asked the agent. "Got towels?"

"Yes. And I'm not a doctor — not for forty years. But I'm the nearest thing to it in this shambles. Who are you?"

Banneker explained. "I'll be back in five minutes," he said and passed into the subdued and tremulous crowd.

On the outskirts loitered a lank, idle young man clad beyond the glories of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck's highest-colored imaginings.

"Hurt?" asked Banneker.

"No," said the youth.

"Can you run three miles?"

"I fancy so."

"Will you take an urgent message to be wired from Manzanita?"

"Certainly," said the youth with good-will.

Tearing a leaf from his pocket-ledger, Banneker scribbled a dispatch which is still preserved in the road's archives as giving more vital information in fewer words than any other railroad document extant. He instructed the messenger where to find a substitute telegrapher.

"Answer?" asked the youth, unfurling his long legs.

"No," returned Banneker, and the courier, tossing his coat off, took the road.

Banneker turned back to the improvised hospital.

"I'm going to move these people into the cars," he said to the man in charge. "The berths are being made up now."

The other nodded. Banneker gathered helpers and superintended the transfer. One of the passengers, an elderly lady who had shown no sign of grave injury, died smiling courageously as they were lifting her.

It gave Banneker a momentary shock of helpless responsibility. Why should she have been the one to die? Only five minutes before she had spoken to him in self-possessed, even tones, saying that her traveling-bag contained camphor, ammonia, and iodine if he needed them. She had seemed a reliable, helpful kind of lady, and now she was dead. It struck Banneker as improbable and, in a queer sense, discriminatory. Remembering the slight, ready smile with which she had addressed him, he felt as if he had suffered a personal loss; he would have liked to stay and work over her, trying to discover if there might not be some spark of life remaining, to be cherished back into flame, but the burly old man's decisive "Gone," settled that. Besides, there were other things, official things to be looked to.

A full report would be expected of him, as to the cause of the accident. The presence of the boulder in the wreckage explained that grimly. It was now his routine duty to collect the names of the dead and wounded, and such details as he could elicit. He went about it briskly, conscientiously, and with distaste. All this would go to the claim agent of the road eventually and might serve to mitigate the total of damages exacted of the company. Vaguely Banneker resented such probable penalties as unfair; the most unremitting watchfulness could not have detected the subtle undermining of that fatal boulder. But essentially he was not interested in claims and damages. His sensitive mind hovered around the mystery of death; that file of crumpled bodies, the woman of the stilled smile, the man fondling a limp hand, weeping quietly. Officially, he was a smooth-working bit of mechanism. As an individual he probed tragic depths to which he was alien otherwise than by a large and vague sympathy. Facts of the baldest were entered neatly; but in the back of his eager brain Banneker was storing details of a far different kind and of no earthly use to a railroad corporation.

He became aware of some one waiting at his elbow. The lank young man had spoken to him twice.

"Well?" said Banneker sharply. "Oh, it's you! How did you get back so soon?"

"Under the hour," replied the other with pride. "Your message has gone. The operator's a queer duck. Dealing faro.

Made me play through a case before he'd quit. I stung him for twenty. Here's some stuff I thought might be useful."

From a cotton bag he discharged a miscellaneous heap of patent preparations; salves, ointments, emollients, liniments, plasters.

"All I could get," he explained. "No drug-store in the funny burg."

"Thank you," said Banneker. "You're all right. Want another job?"

"Certainly," said the lily of the field with undiminished goodwill.

"Go and help the white-whiskered old boy in the Pullman yonder."

"Oh, he'd chase me," returned the other calmly. "He's my uncle. He thinks I'm no use."

"Does he? Well, suppose you get names and addresses of the slightly injured for me, then. Here's your coat."

"Tha-anks," drawled the young man. He was turning away to his new duties when a thought struck him. "Making a list?" he asked.

"Yes. For my report."

"Got a name with the initials I. O. W.?"

Banneker ran through the roster in the pocket-ledger. "Not yet. Some one that's hurt?"

"Don't know what became of her. Peach of a girl. Black hair, big, sleepy, black eyes with a fire in 'em. Dressed *right.* Traveling alone, and minding her own business, too. Had a stateroom in that Pullman there in the ditch. Noticed her initials on her traveling-bag."

"Have you seen her since the smash?"

"Don't know. Got a kind of confused recklection of seeing her wobbling around at the side of the track. Can't be sure, though. Might have been me."

"Might have been you? How could —"

"Wobbly, myself. Mixed in my thinks. When I came to I was pretty busy putting my lunch," explained the other with simple realism. "One of Mr. Pullman's seats butted me in the

stomach. They ain't upholstered as soft as you'd think to look at 'em. I went reeling around, looking for Miss I. O. W., she being alone, you know, and I thought she might need some looking after. And I had that idea of having seen her with her hand to her head dazed and running — yes; that's it, she was running. Wow!" said the young man fervently. "She was a pretty thing! You don't suppose —" He turned hesitantly to the file of bodies, now decently covered with sheets.

For a grisly instant Banneker thought of the one mangled monstrosity — *that* to have been so lately loveliness and charm, with deep fire in its eyes and perhaps deep tenderness and passion in its heart. He dismissed the thought as being against the evidence and entered the initials in his booklet.

"I'll look out for her," said he. "Probably she's forward somewhere."

Without respite he toiled until a long whistle gave notice of the return of the locomotive which had gone forward to meet the delayed special from Stanwood. Human beings were clinging about it in little clusters like bees; physicians, nurses, officials, and hospital attendants. The dispatcher from Stanwood listened to Banneker's brief report, and sent him back to Manzanita, with a curt word of approval for his work.

Banneker's last sight of the wreck, as he paused at the curve, was the helpful young man perched on the rear heap of wreckage which had been the observation car, peering anxiously into its depths ("Looking for I. O. W. probably," surmised the agent), and two commercial gentlemen from the smoker whiling away a commercially unproductive hiatus by playing pinochle on a suitcase held across their knees. Glancing at the vast, swollen, blue-black billows rolling up the sky, Banneker guessed that their game would be shortly interrupted.

He hoped that the dead would not get wet.

## Chapter III

Back in his office, Banneker sent out the necessary wires, and learned from westward that it might be twelve hours before the break in the track near Stanwood could be fixed up. Then he settled down to his report.

Like his earlier telegram, the report was a little masterpiece of concise information. Not a word in it that was not dry, exact, meaningful. This was the more to the writer's credit in that his brain was seething with impressions, luminous with pictures, aflash with odds and ends of minor but significant things heard and seen and felt. It was his first inner view of tragedy and of the reactions of the human creature, brave or stupid or merely absurd, to a crisis. For all of this he had an outlet of expression.

Taking from the wall a file marked "Letters, Private"— it was 5 S 0027, and one of his most used purchases — he extracted some sheets of a special paper and, sitting at his desk, wrote and wrote and wrote, absorbedly, painstakingly, happily. Wind swept the outer world into a vortex of wild rain; the room boomed and trembled with the reverberations of thunder. Twice the telegraph instrument broke in on him; but these matters claimed only the outer shell; the soul of the man was concerned with committing its impressions of other souls to the secrecy of white paper, destined to personal and inviolable archives.

Some one entered the waiting-room. There was a tap on his door. Raising his head impatiently, Banneker saw, through the window already dimming with the gathering dusk, a large roan horse, droopy and disconsolate in the downpour. He jumped up and threw open his retreat. A tall woman, slipping out of a streaming poncho, entered. The simplicity, verging upon coarseness, of her dress detracted nothing from her distinction of bearing.

"Is there trouble on the line?" she asked in a voice of peculiar clarity.

"Bad trouble, Miss Camilla," answered Banneker. He pushed

forward a chair, but she shook her head. "A loosened rock smashed into Number Three in the Cut. Eight dead, and a lot more in bad shape. They've got doctors and nurses from Stanwood. But the track's out below. And from what I get on the wire"— he nodded toward the east — "it'll be out above before long."

"I'd better go up there," said she. Her lips grew bloodless as she spoke and there was a look of effort and pain in her face.

"No; I don't think so. But if you'll go over to the town and see that Torrey gets his place cleaned up a bit, I suppose some of the passengers will be coming in pretty soon."

She made a quick gesture of repulsion. "Women can't go to Torrey's," she said. "It's too filthy. Besides — I'll take in the women, if there aren't too many and I can pick up a buckboard in Manzanita."

He nodded. "That'll be better, if any come in. Give me their names, won't you? I have to keep track of them, you know."

The manner of the two was that of familiars, of friends, though there was a touch of deference in Banneker's bearing, too subtly personal to be attributed to his official status. He went out to adjust the visitor's poncho, and, swinging her leg across the Mexican saddle of her horse with the mechanical ease of one habituated to this mode of travel, she was off.

Again the agent returned to his unofficial task and was instantly submerged in it. Impatiently he interrupted himself to light the lamps and at once resumed his pen. An emphatic knock at his door only caused him to shake his head. The summons was repeated. With a sigh Banneker gathered the written sheets, enclosed them in 5 S 0027, and restored that receptacle to its place. Meantime the knocking continued impatiently, presently pointed by a deep —

"Any one inside there?"

"Yes," said Banneker, opening to face the bulky old man who had cared for the wounded. "What's wanted?"

Uninvited, and with an assured air, the visitor stepped in

"I am Horace Vanney," he announced.

Banneker waited.

"Do you know my name?"

"No."

In no wise discountenanced by the matter-of-fact negative, Mr. Vanney, still unsolicited, took a chair. "You would if you read the newspapers," he observed.

"I do."

"The New York papers," pursued the other, benignly explanatory. "It doesn't matter. I came in to say that I shall make it my business to report your energy and efficiency to your superiors."

"Thank you," said Banneker politely.

"And I can assure you that my commendation will carry weight. Weight, sir."

The agent accepted this with a nod, obviously unimpressed. In fact, Mr. Vanney suspected with annoyance, he was listening not so much to these encouraging statements as to some unidentified noise outside. The agent raised the window and addressed some one who had approached through the steady drive of the rain. A gauntleted hand thrust through the window a slip of paper which he took. As he moved, a ray of light from the lamp, unblocked by his shoulder, fell upon the face of the person in the darkness, illuminating it to the astounded eyes of Mr. Horace Vanney.

"Two of them are going home with me," said a voice. "Will you send these wires to the addresses?"

"All right," replied Banneker, "and thank you. Good-night."

"Who was that?" barked Mr. Vanney, half rising.

"A friend of mine."

"I would swear to that face." He seemed quite excited. "I would swear to it anywhere. It is unforgettable. That was Camilla Van Arsdale. Was she in the wreck?"

"No."

"Don't tell me that it wasn't she! Don't try to tell me, for I won't believe it."

"I'm not trying to tell you anything," Banneker pointed out.

"True; you're not. You're close-mouthed enough. But — Camilla Van Arsdale! Incredible! Does she live here?"

"Here or hereabouts."

"You must give me the address. I must surely go and see her."

"Are you a friend of Miss Van Arsdale?"

"I could hardly say so much. A friend of her family, rather. She would remember me, I am sure. And, in any case, she would know my name. Where did you say she lived?"

"I don't think I said."

"Mystery-making!" The big man's gruffness had a suggestion of amusement in it. "But of course it would be simple enough to find out from town."

"See here, Mr. Vanney, Miss Van Arsdale is still something of an invalid — "

"After all these years," interposed the other, in the tone of one who ruminates upon a marvel.

"— and I happen to know that it isn't well for — that is, she doesn't care to see strangers, particularly from New York."

The old man stared. "Are you a gentleman?" he asked with abrupt surprise.

"A gentleman?" repeated Banneker, taken aback.

"I beg your pardon," said the visitor earnestly. "I meant no offense. You are doubtless quite right. As for any intrusion, I assure you there will be none."

Banneker nodded, and with that nod dismissed the subject quite as effectually as Mr. Horace Vanney himself could have done. "Did you attend all the injured?" he asked.

"All the serious ones, I think."

"Was there a young girl among them, dark and good-looking, whose name began —"

"The one my addle-brained young nephew has been pestering me about? Miss I. O. W.?"

"Yes. He reported her to me."

"I handled no such case that I recall. Now, as to your own helpfulness, I wish to make clear that I appreciate it."

Mr. Vanney launched into a flowery tribute of the after-dinner variety, leaning forward to rest a hand upon Banneker's desk as he spoke. When the speech was over and the hand withdrawn, something remained among the strewn papers. Banneker re-

garded it with interest. It showed a blotch of yellow upon green and a capital C. Picking it up, he looked from it to its giver.

"A little tribute," said that gentleman: "a slight recognition of your services." His manner suggested that hundred-dollar bills were inconsiderable trifles, hardly requiring the acknowledgment of thanks.

In this case the bill did not secure such acknowledgment.

"You don't owe me anything," stated the agent. "I can't take this!"

"What! Pride? Tut-tut."

"Why not?" asked Banneker.

Finding no immediate and appropriate answer to this simple question, Mr. Vanney stared.

"The company pays me. There's no reason why you should pay me. If anything, I ought to pay you for what you did at the wreck. But I'm not proposing to. Of course I'm putting in my report a statement about your help."

Mr. Vanney's cheek flushed. Was this composed young hireling making sport of him?

"Tut–tut!" he said again, this time with obvious intent to chide in his manner. "If I see fit to signify my appreciation — remember, I am old enough to be your father."

"Then you ought to have better judgment," returned Banneker with such candor and good-humor that the visitor was fairly discomfited.

An embarrassing silence — embarrassing, that is, to the older man; the younger seemed not to feel it — was happily interrupted by the advent of the lily-clad messenger.

Hastily retrieving his yellowback, which he subjected to some furtive and occult manipulations, Mr. Vanney, after a few words, took his departure.

Banneker invited the newcomer to take the chair thus vacated. As he did so he brushed something to the floor and picked it up.

"Hello! What's this? Looks like a hundred-bucker. Yours?" He held out the bill.

Banneker shook his head. "Your uncle left it."

"It isn't a habit of his," replied the other.

"Give it to him for me, will you?"

"Certainly. Any message?"

"No."

The newcomer grinned. "I see," he said. "He'll be bored when he gets this back. He isn't a bad old bird, but he don't savvy some things. So you turned him down, did you?"

"Yes."

"Did he offer you a job and a chance to make your way in the world in one of his banks, beginning at ten-per?"

"No."

"He will to-morrow."

"I doubt it."

The other gave a thought to the bill. "Perhaps you're right. He likes 'em meek and obedient. He'd make a woolly lamb out of you. Most fellows would jump at the chance."

"I won't."

"My name's Herbert Cressey." He handed the agent a card. "Philadelphia is my home, but my New York address is on there, too. Ever get East?"

"I've been to Chicago."

"Chicago?" The other stared. "What's that got to do with — Oh, I see. You'll be coming to New York one of these days, though."

"Maybe."

"Sure as a gun. A chap that can handle a situation like you handled the wreck isn't going to stick in a little sand-heap like this."

"It suits me here."

"No! Does it? I'd think you'd die of it. Well, when you do get East look me up, will you? I mean it; I'd like to see you."

"All right."

"And if there's anything I can do for you any time, drop me a line."

The sumptuous ripple and gleam of the young man's faultless coat, registered upon Banneker's subconscious memory as it had fallen at his feet, recalled itself to him.

"What store do you buy your clothes at?"

"Store?" Cressey did not smile. "I don't buy 'em at a store. I have 'em made by a tailor. Mertoun, 505 Fifth Avenue."

"Would he make me a suit?"

"Why, yes. I'll give you a card to him and you go in there when you're in New York and pick out what you want."

"Oh! He wouldn't make them and send them out here to me? Sears-Roebuck do, if you send your measure. They're in Chicago."

"I never had any duds built in Chicago, so I don't know them. But I shouldn't think Mertoun would want to fit a man he'd never seen. They like to do things *right*, at Mertoun's. Ought to, too; they stick you enough for it."

"How much?"

"Not much short of a hundred for a sack suit."

Banneker was amazed. The choicest "made-to-measure" in his Universal Guide, "Snappy, fashionable, and up to the minute," came to less than half of that.

His admiring eye fell upon his visitor's bow-tie, faultless and underanged throughout the vicissitudes of that arduous day, and he yearned to know whether it was "made-up" or self-confected. Sears-Roebuck were severely impartial as between one practice and the other, offering a wide range in each variety. He inquired.

"Oh, tied it myself, of course," returned Cressey. "Nobody wears the ready-made kind. It's no trick to do it. I'll show you, any time."

They fell into friendly talk about the wreck.

It was ten-thirty when Banneker finished his much-interrupted writing. Going out to the portable house, he lighted an oil-stove and proceeded to make a molasses pie. He was due for a busy day on the morrow and might not find time to take the mile walk to the hotel for dinner, as was his general habit. With the store of canned goods derived from the mail-order catalogue, he could always make shift to live. Besides, he was young enough to relish keenly molasses pie and the manufacture of it. Having concluded his cookery in strict accordance with the rules set forth in the guide to this art, he laid it out on the sill to cool over night.

Tired though he was, his brain was too busy for immediate

sleep. He returned to his den, drew out a book and began to read with absorption. That in which he now sought release and distraction was not the *magnum opus* of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck, but the work of a less practical and popular writer, being in fact the "Eve of St. Agnes," by John Keats. Soothed and dreamy, he put out the lights, climbed to his living quarters above the office, and fell asleep. It was then eleven-thirty and his official day had terminated five hours earlier.

At one o'clock he arose and patiently descended the stairs again. Some one was hammering on the door. He opened without inquiry, which was not the part of wisdom in that country and at that hour. His pocket-flash gleamed on a thin young man in a black-rubber coat who, with head and hands retracted as far as possible from the pouring rain, resembled a disconsolate turtle with an insufficient carapace.

"I'm Gardner, of the Angelica City Herald," explained the untimely visitor.

Banneker was surprised. That a reporter should come all the way from the metropolis of the Southwest to his wreck — he had already established proprietary interest in it — was gratifying. Furthermore, for reasons of his own, he was glad to see a journalist. He took him in and lighted up the office.

"Had to get a horse and ride to Manzanita to interview old Vanney and a couple of other big guys from the East. My first story's on the wire," explained the newcomer offhand. "I want some local-color stuff for my second day follow-up."

"It must be hard to do that," said Banneker interestedly, "when you haven't seen any of it yourself."

"Patchwork and imagination," returned the other wearily. "That's what I get special rates for. Now, if I'd had your chance, right there on the spot, with the whole stage-setting around one — Lordy! How a fellow could write that!"

"Not so easy," murmured the agent. "You get confused. It's a sort of blur, and when you come to put it down, little things that aren't really important come up to the surface —"

"Put it down?" queried the other with a quick look. "Oh, I see. Your report for the company."

"Well, I wasn't thinking of that."

"Do you write other things?" asked the reporter carelessly.

"Oh, just foolery." The tone invited — at least it did not discourage — further inquiry. Mr. Gardner was bored. Amateurs who "occasionally write" were the bane of him who, having a signature of his own in the leading local paper, represented to the aspiring mind the gilded and lofty peaks of the unattainable. However he must play this youth as a source of material.

"Ever try for the papers?"

"Not yet. I've thought maybe I might get a chance sometime as a sort of local correspondent around here," was the diffident reply.

Gardner repressed a grin. Manzanita would hardly qualify as a news center. Diplomacy prompted him to state vaguely that there was always a chance for good stuff locally.

"On a big story like this," he added, "of course there'd be nothing doing except for the special man sent out to cover it."

"No. Well, I didn't write my — what I wrote, with any idea of getting it printed."

The newspaper man sighed wearily, sighed like a child and lied like a man of duty. "I'd like to see it."

Without a trace of hesitation or self-consciousness Banneker said, "All right," and, taking his composition from its docket, motioned the other to the light. Mr. Gardner finished and turned the first sheet before making any observation. Then he bent a queer look upon Banneker and grunted:

"What do you call this stuff, anyway?"

"Just putting down what I saw."

Gardner read on. "What about this, about a Pullman sleeper 'elegant as a hotel bar and rigid as a church pew'? Where do you get that?"

Banneker looked startled. "I don't know. It just struck me that is the way a Pullman is."

"Well, it is," admitted the visitor, and continued to read. "And this guy with the smashed finger that kept threatening to 'soom'; is that right?"

"Of course it's right. You don't think I'd make it up! That

reminds me of something." And he entered a memo to see the litigious-minded complainant again, for these are the cases which often turn up in the courts with claims for fifty-thousand-dollar damages and heartrending details of all-but-mortal internal injuries.

Silence held the reader until he had concluded the seventh and last sheet. Not looking at Banneker, he said:

"So that's your notion of reporting the wreck of the swellest train that crosses the continent, is it?"

"It doesn't pretend to be a report," disclaimed the writer. "It's pretty bad, is it?"

"It's rotten!" Gardner paused. "From a news-desk point of view. Any copy-reader would chuck it. Unless I happened to sign it," he added. "Then they'd cuss it out and let it pass, and the dear old pin-head public would eat it up."

"If it's of any use to you —"

"Not so, my boy, not so! I might pinch your wad if you left it around loose, or even your last cigarette, but not your stuff. Let me take it along, though; it may give me some ideas. I'll return it. Now, where can I get a bed in the town?"

"Nowhere. Everything's filled. But I can give you a hammock out in my shack."

"That's better. I'll take it. Thanks."

Banneker kept his guest awake beyond the limits of decent hospitality, asking him questions.

The reporter, constantly more interested in this unexpected find of a real personality in an out-of-the-way minor station of the high desert, meditated a character study of "the hero of the wreck," but could not quite contrive any peg whereon to hang the wreath of heroism. By his own modest account, Banneker had been competent but wholly unpicturesque, though the characters in his sketch, rude and unformed though it was, stood out clearly. As to his own personal history, the agent was unresponsive. At length the guest, apologizing for untimely weariness, it being then 3.15 A.M., yawned his way to the portable shack.

He slept heavily, except for a brief period when the rain let up. In the morning — which term seasoned newspaper men apply to

twelve noon and the hour or two thereafter — he inquired of Banneker,

"Any tramps around here?"

"No," answered the agent. "Not often. There were a pair yesterday morning, but they went on."

"Some one was fussing around the place about first light. I was too sleepy to get up. I yipped and they beat it. I don't think they got inside."

Banneker investigated. Nothing was missing from within the shack. But outside he made a distressing discovery.

His molasses pie was gone.

## Chapter IV

"To accomplisn a dessert as simple and inexpensive as it is tasty," prescribes The Complete Manual of Cookery, p. 48, "take one cup of thick molasses —" But why should I infringe a copyright when the culinary reader may acquire the whole range of kitchen lore by expending eighty-nine cents plus postage on 39 T 337? Banneker had faithfully followed the prescribed instructions. The result had certainly been simple and inexpensive; presumably it would have proven tasty. He regretted and resented the rape of the pie. What aroused greater concern, however, was the presence of thieves. In the soft ground near the window he found some rather small footprints which suggested that it was the younger of the two hoboes who had committed the depredation.

Theorizing, however, was not the order of his day. Routine and extra-routine claimed all his time. There was his supplementary report to make out; the marooned travelers in Manzanita to be looked after and their bitter complaints to be listened to; consultations over the wire as to the condition and probabilities of the roadbed, for the floods had come again; and in and out of it all, the busy, weary, indefatigable Gardner, giving to the agent as much information as he asked from him. When their final lists were compared, Banneker noticed that there was no name with the initials I. O. W. on Gardner's. He thought of mentioning the clue, but decided that it was of too little definiteness and importance. The news value of mystery, enhanced by youth and beauty, which the veriest cub who had ever smelled printer's ink would have appreciated, was a sealed book to him.

Not until late that afternoon did a rescue train limp cautiously along an improvised track to set the interrupted travelers on their way. Gardner went on it, leaving an address and an invitation to "keep in touch." Mr. Vanney took his departure with a few benign and well-chosen words of farewell, accompanied by the assurance that he would "make it his special purpose to com-

mend," and so on. His nephew, Herbert Cressey, the lily-clad messenger, stopped at the station to shake hands and grin rather vacantly, and adjure Banneker, whom he addressed as "old chap," to be sure and look him up in the East; he'd be glad to see him any time. Banneker believed that he meant it. He promised to do so, though without particular interest. With the others departed Miss Camilla Van Arsdale's two emergency guests, one of them the rather splendid young woman who had helped with the wounded. They invaded Banneker's office with supplementary telegrams and talked about their hostess with that freedom which women of the world use before dogs or uniformed officials.

"What a woman!" said the amateur nurse.

"And what a house!" supplemented the other, a faded and lined middle-aged wife who had just sent a reassuring and very long wire to a husband in Pittsburgh.

"Very much the châtelaine; grande dame and that sort of thing," pursued the other. "One might almost think her English."

"No." The other shook her head positively. "Old American. As old and as good as her name. You wouldn't flatter her by guessing her to be anything else. I dare say she would consider the average British aristocrat a little shoddy and loud."

"So they are when they come over here. But what on earth is her type doing out here, buried with a one-eyed, half-breed manservant?"

"And a concert grand piano. Don't forget that. She tunes it herself, too. Did you notice the tools? A possible romance. You've quite a nose for such things, Sue. Couldn't you get anything out of her?"

"It's much too good a nose to put in the crack of a door," retorted the pretty woman. "I shouldn't care to lay myself open to being snubbed by her. It might be painful."

"It probably would." The Pittsburgher turned to Banneker with a change of tone, implying that he could not have taken any possible heed of what went before. "Has Miss Van Arsdale lived here long, do you know?"

The agent looked at her intently for a moment before replying:

"Longer than I have." He transferred his gaze to the pretty woman. "You two were her guests, weren't you?" he asked.

The visitors glanced at each other, half amused, half aghast. The tone and implication of the question had been too significant to be misunderstood. "Well, of all extraordinary — " began one of them under her breath; and the other said more loudly, "I really beg —" and then she, too, broke off.

They went out. "Châtelaine and knightly defender," commented the younger one in the refuge of the outer office. "Have we been dumped off a train into the midst of the Middle Ages? Where do you get station-agents like that?"

"The one at our suburban station chews tobacco and says 'Marm' through his nose."

Banneker emerged, seeking the conductor of the special with a message.

"He is rather a beautiful young thing, isn't he?" she added.

Returning, he helped them on the train with their hand-luggage. When the bustle and confusion of dispatching an extra were over, he sat down to think. But not of Miss Camilla Van Arsdale. That was an old story, though its chapters were few, and none of them as potentially eventful as this intrusion of Vanneys and female chatterers.

It was the molasses pie that stuck in his mind. There was no time to make another. Further, the thought of depredators hanging about disturbed him. That shack of his was full of Aladdin treasures, delivered by the summoned genii of the Great Book. Though it was secured by Little Guardian locks and fortified with the Scarem Buzz alarm, he did not feel sure of it. He decided to sleep there that night with his .45-caliber Sure-shot revolver. Let them come again; he'd give 'em a lesson! On second thought, he rebaited the window-ledge with a can of Special Juicy Apricot Preserve. At ten o'clock he turned in, determined to sleep lightly, and immediately plunged into fathomless depths of unconsciousness, lulled by a singing wind and the drone of the rain.

A light, flashing across his eyes, awakened him. For a moment he lay, dazed, confused by the gentle and unfamiliar oscillations of his hammock. Another flicker of light and a rumble of thunder

brought him to his full senses. The rain had degenerated into a casual drizzle and the wind had withdrawn into the higher areas. He heard some one moving outside.

Very quietly he reached out to the stand at his elbow, got his revolver and his flashlight, and slipped to the floor. The male-factor without was approaching the window. Another flash of lightning would have revealed much to Banneker had he not been crouching close under the sill, on the inside, so that the radiance of his light, when he found the button, should not expose him to a straight shot.

A hand fumbled at the open window. Finger on trigger, Banneker held up his flash-light in his left hand and irradiated the spot. He saw the hand, groping, and on one of its fingers something which returned a more brilliant gleam than the electric ray. In his crass amazement, the agent straightened up, a full mark for murder, staring at a diamond-and-ruby ring set upon a short, delicate finger.

No sound came from outside. But the hand became instantly tense. It fell upon the sill and clutched it so hard that the knuckles stood out, white, strained and garish. Banneker's own strong hand descended upon the wrist. A voice said softly and tremulously:

"Please!"

The appeal went straight to Banneker's heart and quivered there, like a soft flame, like music heard in an unrealizable dream.

"Who are you?" he asked, and the voice said:

"Don't hurt me."

"Why should I?" returned Banneker stupidly.

"Some one did," said the voice.

"Who?" he demanded fiercely.

"Won't you let me go?" pleaded the voice.

In the shock of his discovery he had released the flash-lever so that this colloquy passed in darkness. Now he pressed it. A girlish figure was revealed, one protective arm thrown across the eyes.

"Don't strike me," said the girl again, and again Banneker's

heart was shaken within him by such tremors as the crisis of some deadly fear might cause.

"You needn't be afraid," he stammered.

"I've never been afraid before," she said, hanging her weight away from him. "Won't you let me go?"

His grip relaxed slightly, then tightened again. "Where to?"

"I don't know," said the appealing voice mournfully.

An inspiration came to Banneker. "Are you afraid of me?" he asked quietly.

"Of everything. Of the night."

He pressed the flash into her hand, turning the light upon himself. "Look," he said.

It seemed to him that she could not fail to read in his face the profound and ardent wish to help her; to comfort and assure an uneasy and frightened spirit wandering in the night.

He heard a little, soft sigh. "I don't know you," said the voice. "Do I?"

"No," he answered soothingly as if to a child. "I'm the station-agent here. You must come in out of the wet."

"Very well."

He tossed an overcoat on over his pajamas, ran to the door and swung it open. The tiny ray of light advanced, hesitated, advanced again. She walked into the shack, and immediately the rain burst again upon the outer world. Banneker's fleeting impression was of a vivid but dimmed beauty. He pushed forward a chair, found a blanket for her feet, lighted the "Quick-heater" oil-stove on which he did his cooking. She followed him with her eyes, deeply glowing but vague and troubled.

"This is not a station," she said.

"No. It's my shack. Are you cold?"

"Not very." She shivered a little.

"You say that some one hurt you?"

"Yes. They struck me. It made my head feel queer."

A murderous fury surged into his brain. His hand twitched toward his revolver.

"The hoboes," he whispered under his breath. "But they didn't rob you," he said aloud, looking at the jeweled hand.

"No. I don't think so. I ran away."

"Where was it?"

"On the train."

Enlightenment burst upon him. "You're sure —" he began. Then, "Tell me all you can about it."

"I don't remember anything. I was in my stateroom in the car. The door was open. Some one must have come in and struck me. Here." She put her left hand tenderly to her head.

Banneker, leaning over her, only half suppressed a cry. Back of the temple rose a great, puffed, leaden-blue wale.

"Sit still," he said. "I'll fix it."

While he busied himself heating water, getting out clean bandages and gauze, she leaned back with half-closed eyes in which there was neither fear nor wonder nor curiosity: only a still content. Banneker washed the wound very carefully.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"My head feels queer. Inside."

"I think the hair ought to be cut away around the place. Right here. It's quite raw."

It was glorious hair. Not black, as Cressey had described it in his hasty sketch of the unknown I. O. W.; too alive with gleams and glints of luster for that. Nor were her eyes black, but rather of a deep-hued, clouded hazel, showing troubled shadows between their dark-lashed, heavy lids. Yet Banneker made no doubt but that this was the missing girl of Cressey's inquiry

"May I?" he said.

"Cut my hair?" she asked. "Oh, no!"

"Just a little, in one place. I think I can do it so that it won't show. There's so much of it."

"Please," she answered, yielding.

He was deft. She sat quiet and soothed under his ministerings. Completed, the bandage looked not too unworkmanlike, and was cool and comforting to the hot throb of the wound.

"Our doctor went back on the train, worse luck!" he said.

"I don't want any other doctor," she murmured. "I'd rather have you."

"But I'm not a doctor."

"No," she acquiesced. "Who are you? Did you tell me? You are one of the passengers, aren't you?"

"I'm the station-agent at Manzanita."

For a moment she looked at him wonderingly. "Are you? I don't seem to understand. My head is very queer."

"Don't try to. Here's some tea and crackers."

"I'm starved," she said.

With subtle stirrings of delight, he watched her eat the bit that he had prepared for her while heating the water. But he was wise enough to know that she must not have much while the extent of her injury was still undetermined.

"Are you wet?" he inquired.

She nodded. "I haven't been dry since the flood."

"I have a room with a real stove in it over the station. I'll build a fire, and you must take off your wet things and go to bed and sleep. If you need anything you can hammer on the floor."

"But you —"

"I'll be in my office, below. I'm on night duty to-night," said he, tactfully fabricating.

"Very well. You're awfully kind."

He adjusted the oil-stove, threw a warmed blanket over her feet, and hurried to his room to build the promised fire. When he came back she smiled.

"You are good to me! It's stupid of me — my head is so queer — did you say you were —"

"The station-agent. My name is Banneker. I'm responsible to the company for your safety and comfort. You're not to worry about it, nor think about it, nor ask any questions."

"No," she agreed, and rose.

He threw the blanket around her shoulders. At the protective touch she slipped her hand through his arm. So they went out into the night.

Mounting the stairs, she stumbled, and for a moment he felt the firm, warm pressure of her body against him. It shook him strangely.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. And, a moment later, "Good-night, and thank you."

Taking the hand which she held out, he returned her good-night. The door closed. He turned away and was halfway down the flight when a sudden thought recalled him. He tapped on the door.

"What is it?" asked the serene music of the voice.

"I don't want to bother you, but there's just one thing I forgot. Please give me your name."

"What for?" returned the voice doubtfully.

"I must report it to the company."

"Must you?" The voice seemed to be vaguely troubled. "To-night?"

"Don't give a thought to it," he said. "To-morrow will do just as well. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

"Good-night," she said again.

"Can't remember her own name!" thought Banneker, moved and pitiful.

Darkness and quiet were grateful to him as he entered the office. By sense of direction he found his chair, and sank into it. Overhead he could hear the soft sound of her feet moving about the room, his room. Quiet succeeded. Banneker, leagues removed from sleep, or the hope of it, despite his bodily weariness, followed the spirit of wonder through starlit and sunlit realms of dream.

The telegraph-receiver clicked. Not his call. But it brought him back to actualities. He lighted his lamp and brought down the letter-file from which had been extracted the description of the wreck for Gardner of the Angelica City Herald.

Drawing out the special paper, he looked at the heading and smiled. "Letters to Nobody." He took a fresh sheet and began to write. Through the night he wrote and dreamed and dozed and wrote again. When a sound of song, faint and sweet and imminent, roused him to lift his sleep-bowed head from the desk upon which it had sunk, the gray, soiled light of a stormy morning was in his eyes. The last words he had written were:

"The breast of the world rises and falls with your breathing."

Banneker was twenty-four years old, and had the untainted soul of a boy of sixteen.

## Chapter V

Overhead she was singing. The voice was clear and sweet and happy. He did not know the melody; some minor refrain of broken rhythm which seemed always to die away short of fulfillment. A haunting thing of mystery and glamour, such mystery and glamour as had irradiated his long and wonderful night. He heard the door open and then her light footsteps on the stair outside. Hot-eyed and disheveled, he rose, staggering a little at first as he hurried to greet her.

She stood poised on the lower step.

"Good-morning," he said.

She made no return to his accost other than a slow smile. "I thought you were a dream," she murmured.

"No. I'm real enough. Are you better? Your head?"

She put a hand to the bandage. "It's sore. Otherwise I'm quite fit. I've slept like the dead."

"I'm glad to hear it," he replied mechanically. He was drinking her in, all the grace and loveliness and wonder of her, himself quite unconscious of the intensity of his gaze.

She accepted the mute tribute untroubled; but there was a suggestion of puzzlement in the frown which began to pucker her forehead.

"You're really the station-agent?" she asked with a slight emphasis upon the adverb.

"Yes. Why not?"

"Nothing. No reason. Won't you tell me what happened?"

"Come inside." He held open the door against the wind.

"No. It's musty." She wrinkled a dainty nose. "Can't we talk here? I love the feel of the air and the wet. And the world! I'm glad I wasn't killed."

"So am I," he said soberly.

"When my brain wouldn't work quite right yesterday, I thought that some one had hit me. That isn't so, is it?"

"No. Your train was wrecked. You were injured. In the confusion you must have run away."

"Yes. I remember being frightened. Terribly frightened. I'd never been that way before. Outside of that one idea of fear, everything was mixed up. I ran until I couldn't run any more and dropped down."

"And then?"

"I got up and ran again. Have you ever been afraid?"

"Plenty of times."

"I hadn't realized before that there was anything in the world to be afraid of. But the thought of that blow, coming so suddenly from nowhere, and the fear that I might be struck again — it drove me." She flung out her hands in a little desperate gesture that twitched at Banneker's breath.

"You must have been out all night in the rain."

"No. I found a sort of cabin in the woods. It was deserted."

"Dutch Cal's place. It's only a few rods back in."

"I saw a light from there and that suggested to my muddled brain that I might get something to eat."

"So you came over here."

"Yes. But the fear came on me again and I didn't dare knock. I suppose I prowled."

"Gardner thought he heard ghosts. But ghosts don't steal molasses pie."

She looked at him solemnly. "Must one steal to get anything to eat here?"

"I'm sorry," he cried. "I'll get you breakfast right away. What will you have? There isn't much."

"Anything there is. But if I'm to board with you, you must let me pay my way."

"The company is responsible for that."

Her brooding eyes were still fixed upon him. "You actually are the agent," she mused. "That's quaint."

"I don't see anything quaint about it. Now, if you'll make yourself comfortable I'll go over to the shack and rustle something for breakfast."

"No; I'd rather go with you. Perhaps I can help."

Such help as the guest afforded was negligible. When, from sundry of the Sears-Roebuck cans and bottles, a condensed and

preserved sort of meal had been derived, she set to it with a good grace.

"There's more of a kick in tea than in a cocktail, I believe, when you really need it," she remarked gratefully. "You spoke of a Mr. Gardner. Who is he?"

"A reporter who spent night before last here."

She dropped her cracker, oleomargarine-side down. "A reporter?"

"He came down to write up the wreck. It's a bad one. Nine dead, so far."

"Is he still here?"

"No. Gone back to Angelica City."

Retrieving her cracker, the guest finished her meal, heartily but thoughtfully. She insisted on lending a hand to the washing-up process, and complimented Banneker on his neatness.

"You haven't told me your name yet," he reminded her when the last shining tin was hung up.

"No; I haven't. What will you do with it when you get it?"

"Report it to the company for their lists."

"Suppose I don't want it reported to the company?'

"Why on earth shouldn't you?"

"I may have my reasons. Would it be put in the papers?"

"Very likely."

"I don't *want* it in the papers," said the girl with decision.

"Don't you want it known that you're all right? Your people —"

"I'll wire my people. Or you can wire them for me. Can't you?"

"Of course. But the company has a right to know what has happened to its passengers."

"Not to me! What has the company done for me but wreck me and give me an awful bang on the head and lose my baggage and — Oh, I nearly forgot. I took my traveling-bag when I ran. It's in the hut. I wonder if you would get it for me?"

"Of course. I'll go now."

"That's good of you. And for your own self, but not your old company, I'll tell you my name. I'm —"

"Wait a moment. Whatever you tell me I'll have to report."

"You can't," she returned imperiously. "It's in confidence."

"I won't accept it so."

"You're a most extraordinary sta— a most extraordinary sort of man. Then I'll give you this much for yourself, and if your company collects pet names, you can pass it on. My friends call me Io."

"Yes. I know. You're I. O. W."

"How do you know that? And how much more do you know?"

"No more. A man on the train reported your initials from your baggage."

"I'll feel ever so much better when I have that bag. Is there a hotel near here?"

"A sort of one at Manzanita. It isn't very clean. But there'll be a train through to-night and I'll get you space on that. I'd better get a doctor for you first, hadn't I?"

"No, indeed! All I need is some fresh things."

Banneker set off at a brisk pace. He found the extravagant little traveling-case safely closed and locked, and delivered it outside his own door which was also closed and, he suspected, locked.

"I'm thinking," said the soft voice of the girl within. "Don't let me interrupt your work."

Beneath, at his routine, Banneker also set himself to think; confused, bewildered, impossibly conjectural thoughts not unmingled with semi-official anxiety. Harboring a woman on company property, even though she were, in some sense, a charge of the company, might be open to misconceptions. He wished that the mysterious Io would declare herself.

At noon she did. She declared herself ready for luncheon. There was about her a matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation as natural, even inevitable, which entranced Banneker when it did not appall him. After the meal was over, the girl seated herself on a low bench which Banneker had built with his own hands and the Right-and-Ready Tool Kit (9 T 603), her knee between her clasped hands and an elfish expression on her face.

"Don't you think," she suggested, "that we'd get on quicker if you washed the dishes and I sat here and talked to you?"

"Very likely."

"It isn't so easy to begin, you know," she remarked, nursing her knee thoughtfully. "Am I — Do you find me very much in the way?"

"No."

"Don't suppress your wild enthusiasm on my account," she besought him. "I haven't interfered with your duties so far, have I?"

"No," answered Banneker wondering what was coming next.

"You see"— her tone became ruminative and confidential — "if I give you my name and you report it, there'll be all kinds of a mix-up. They'll come after me and take me away."

Banneker dropped a tin on the floor and stood, staring.

"Isn't that what you want?"

"It's evident enough that it's what *you* want," she returned, aggrieved.

"No. Not at all," he disclaimed. "Only — well, out here — alone — I don't understand."

"Can't you understand that if one had happened to drop out of the world by chance, it might be desirable to stay out for a while?"

"For *you?* No; I can't understand that."

"What about yourself?" she challenged with a swift, amused gleam. "You are certainly staying out of the world here."

"This is my world."

Her eyes and voice dropped. "Truly?" she murmured. Then, as he made no reply, "It isn't much of a world for a man."

To this his response touched the heights of the unexpected. He stretched out his arm toward the near window through which could be seen the white splendor of Mount Carstairs, dim in the wreathing murk.

> "Lo! For there, amidst the flowers and grasses,
> Only the mightier movement sounds and passes,
> Only winds and rivers,
> Life and death."

he quoted.

Her eyes glowed with sheer, incredulous astonishment. "How came you by that Stevenson?" she demanded. "Are you poet as well as recluse?"

"I met him once."

"Tell me about it."

"Some other time. We've other things to talk of now."

"Some other time? Then I'm to stay!"

"In Manzanita?"

"Manzanita? No. Here."

"In this station? Alone? But why —"

"Because I'm Io Welland and I want to, and I always get what I want," she retorted calmly and superbly.

"Welland," he repeated. "Miss I. O. Welland. And the address is New York, isn't it?"

Her hands grew tense across her knee, and deep in her shadowed eyes there was a flash. But her voice suggested not only appeal, but almost a hint of caress as she said:

"Are you going to betray a guest? I've always heard that Western hospitality —"

"You're not my guest. You're the company's."

"And you won't take me for yours?"

"Be reasonable, Miss Welland."

"I suppose it's a question of the conventionalities," she mocked.

"I don't know or care anything about the conventionalities—"

"Nor I," she interrupted. "Out here."

"— but my guess would be that they apply only to people who live in the same world. We don't, you and I."

"That's rather shrewd of you," she observed.

"It isn't an easy matter to talk about to a young girl, you know."

"Oh, yes, it is," she returned with composure. "Just take it for granted that I know about all there is to be known and am not afraid of it. I'm not afraid of anything, I think, except of — of having to go back just now." She rose and went to him, looking down into his eyes. "A woman knows whom she can trust in — in certain things. That's her gift, a gift no man has or quite under-

stands. Dazed as I was last night, I knew I could trust you. I still know it. So we may dismiss that."

"That is true," said Banneker, "so far as it goes."

"What farther is there? If it's a matter of the inconvenience — "

"No. You know it isn't that."

"Then let me stay in this funny little shack just for a few days," she pleaded. "If you don't, I'll get on to-night's train and go on and — and do something I'll be sorry for all the rest of my life. And it'll be your fault! I was going to do it when the accident prevented. Do you believe in Providence?"

"Not as a butt-in," he answered promptly. "I don't believe that Providence would pitch a rock into a train and kill a lot of people, just to prevent a girl from making a foo — a bad break."

"Nor I," she smiled. "I suppose there's some kind of a General Manager over this queer world; but I believe He plays the game fair and square and doesn't break the rules He has made Himself. If I didn't, I wouldn't want to play at all!...Oh, my telegram! I must wire my aunt in New York. I'll tell her that I've stopped off to visit friends, if you don't object to that description as being too compromising," she added mischievously. She accepted a pad which he handed her and sat at the table, pondering. "Mr. Banneker," she said after a moment.

"Well?"

"If the telegram goes from here, will it be headed by the name of the station?"

"Yes."

"So that inquiry might be made here for me?"

"It might, certainly."

"But I don't want it to be. Couldn't you leave off the station?"

"Not very well."

"Just for me?" she wheedled. "For your guest that you've been so insistent on keeping," she added slyly.

"The message wouldn't be accepted."

"Oh, dear! Then I won't send it."

"If you don't notify your family, I must report you to the company."

"What an irritating sense of duty you have! It must be dreadful to be afflicted that way. Can't you suggest something?" she flashed. "Won't you do a *thing* to help me stay? I believe you don't want me, after all."

"If the up-train gets through this evening, I'll give your wire to the engineer and he'll transmit it from any office you say."

Childlike with pleasure she clapped her hands. "Of course! Give him this, will you?" From a bag at her wrist she extracted a five-dollar bill. "By the way, if I'm to be a guest I must be a paying guest, of course."

"You can pay for a cot that I'll get in town," he agreed, "and your share of the food."

"But the use of the house, and — and all the trouble I'm making you," she said doubtfully. "I ought to pay for that."

"Do you think so?" He looked at her with a peculiar expression which, however, was not beyond the power of her intuition to interpret.

"No; I don't," she declared.

Banneker answered her smile with his own, as he resumed his dish-wiping. Io wrote out her telegram with care. Her next observation startled the agent.

"Are you, by any chance, married?"

"No; I'm not. What makes you ask that?"

"There's been a woman in here before."

Confusedly his thoughts flew back to Carlotta. But the Mexican girl had never been in the shack. He was quite absurdly and inexplicably glad now that she had not.

"A woman?" he said. "Why do you think so?"

"Something in the arrangement of the place. That hanging, yonder. And that little vase — it's good, by the way. The way that Navajo is placed on the door. One feels it."

"It's true. A friend of mine came here one day and turned everything topsy-turvy."

"I'm not asking questions just for curiosity. But is that the reason you didn't want me to stay?"

He laughed, thinking of Miss Van Arsdale. "Heavens, no! Wait till you meet her. She's a very wonderful person; but —"

"Meet her? Does she live near here, then?"

"A few miles away."

"Suppose she should come and find me here?"

"It's what I've been wishing."

"Is it! Well, it isn't what I wish at all."

"In fact," continued the imperturbable Banneker, "I rather planned to ride over to her place this afternoon."

"Why, if you please?"

"To tell her about you and ask her advice."

Io's face darkened rebelliously. "Do you think it necessary to tattle to a woman who is a total stranger to me?"

"I think it would be wise to get her view," he replied, unmoved.

"Well, I think it would be horrid. I think if you do any such thing, you are — Mr. Banneker! You're not listening to me."

"Some one is coming through the woods trail," said he.

"Perhaps it's your local friend."

"That's my guess."

"Please understand this, Mr. Banneker," she said with an obstinate outthrust of her little chin. "I don't know who your friend is and I don't care. If you make it necessary, I can go to the hotel in town; but while I stay here I won't have my affairs or even my presence discussed with any one else."

"You're too late," said Banneker.

Out from a hardly discernible opening in the brush shouldered a big roan. Tossing up his head, he stretched out in the long, easy lope of the desert-bred, his rider sitting him loosely and with slack bridle.

"That's Miss Van Arsdale," said Banneker.

## Chapter VI

Seated in her saddle the newcomer hailed Banneker.

"What news, Ban? Is the wreck cleared up?"

"Yes. But the track is out twenty miles east. Every arroyo and barranca is bank-high and over."

He had crossed the platform to her. Now she raised her deep-set, quiet eyes and rested them on the girl. That the station should harbor a visitor at that hour was not surprising. But the beauty of the stranger caught Miss Van Arsdale's regard, and her bearing held it.

"A passenger, Ban?" she asked, lowering her voice.

"Yes, Miss Camilla."

"Left over from the wreck?"

He nodded. "You came in the nick of time. I don't quite know what to do with her."

"Why didn't she go on the relief train?"

"She didn't show up until last night."

"Where did she stay the night?"

"Here."

"In your office?"

"In my room. I worked in the office."

"You should have brought her to me."

"She was hurt. Queer in the head. I'm not sure that she isn't so yet."

Miss Van Arsdale swung her tall form easily out of the saddle. The girl came forward at once, not waiting for Banneker's introduction, with a formal gravity.

"How do you do? I am Irene Welland."

The older woman took the extended hand. There was courtesy rather than kindliness in her voice as she asked, "Are you much hurt?"

"I'm quite over it, thank you. All but the bandage. Mr. Banneker was just speaking of you when you rode up, Miss Van Arsdale."

The other smiled wanly. "It is a little startling to hear one's

name like that, in a voice from another world. When do you go on?"

"Ah, that's a point under discussion. Mr. Banneker would, I believe, summon a special train if he could, in his anxiety to get rid of me."

"Not at all," disclaimed the agent.

But Miss Van Arsdale interrupted, addressing the girl:

"You must be anxious, yourself, to get back to civilization."

"Why?" returned the girl lightly. "This seems a beautiful locality."

"Were you traveling alone?"

The girl flushed a little, but her eyes met the question without wavering. "Quite alone."

"To the coast?"

"To join friends there."

"If they can patch up the washed-out track," put in Banneker, "Number Seven ought to get through to-night."

"And Mr. Banneker in his official capacity was almost ready to put me aboard by force, when I succeeded in gaining a reprieve. Now he calls you to his rescue."

"What do you want to do?" inquired Miss Van Arsdale with lifted brows.

"Stay here for a few days, in that funny little house." She indicated the portable shack.

"That is Mr. Banneker's own place."

"I understand perfectly."

"I don't think it would do, Miss Welland. It is *Miss* Welland, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed. Why wouldn't it do, Miss Van Arsdale?"

"Ask yourself."

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself," returned the girl calmly. "As for Mr. Banneker, I assume that he is equally competent. And," she added with a smiling effrontery, "he's quite as much compromised already as he could possibly be by my staying."

Banneker flushed angrily. "There's no question of my being compromised," he began shortly.

"You're wrong, Ban; there is," Miss Van Arsdale's quiet voice cut him short again. "And still more of Miss Welland's. What sort of escapade this may be," she added, turning to the girl, "I have no idea. But you cannot stay here alone."

"Can't I?" retorted the other mutinously. "I think that rests with Mr. Banneker to say. Will you turn me out, Mr. Banneker? After our agreement?"

"No," said Banneker.

"You can hardly kidnap me, even with all the conventionalities on your side," Miss Welland pointed out to Miss Van Arsdale.

That lady made no answer to the taunt. She was looking at the station-agent with a humorously expectant regard. He did not disappoint her.

"If I get an extra cot for the shack, Miss Van Arsdale," he asked, "could you get your things and come over here to stay?"

"Certainly."

"I won't be treated like a child!" cried the derelict in exactly the tone of one, and a very naughty one. "I won't! I won't!" She stamped.

Banneker laughed.

"You're a coward," said Io

Miss Van Arsdale laughed.

"I'll go to the hotel in the town and stay there."

"Think twice before you do that," advised the woman.

"Why?" asked Io, struck by the tone.

"Crawly things," replied Miss Van Arsdale sententiously.

"Big, hungry ones," added Banneker.

He could almost feel the little rippling shudders passing across the girl's delicate skin. "Oh, I think you're *loathly!*" she cried. "Both of you."

Tears of vexation made lucent the shadowed depths of her eyes. "I've never been treated so in my life!" she declared, overcome by the self-pity of a struggling soul trammeled by the world's injustice.

"Why not be sensible and stay with me to-night while you think it all over?" suggested Miss Van Arsdale.

"Thank you," returned the other with an unexpected and baffling change to the amenable and formal "You are very kind. I'd be delighted to."

"Pack up your things, then, and I'll bring an extra horse from the town. I'll be back in an hour."

The girl went up to Banneker's room, and got her few belongings together. Descending she found the agent busy among his papers. He put them aside and came out to her.

"Your telegram ought to get off from Williams sometime to-morrow," he said.

"That will be time enough," she answered.

"Will there be any answer?"

"How can there be? I haven't given any address."

"I could wire Williams later."

"No. I don't want to be bothered. I want to be let alone. I'm tired."

He cast a glance about the lowering horizon. "More rain coming," he said. "I wish you could have seen the desert in the sunshine."

"I'll wait."

"Will you?" he cried eagerly. "It may be quite a while."

"Perhaps Miss Van Arsdale will keep me, as you wouldn't."

He shook his head. "You know that it isn't because I don't want you to stay. But she is right. It just wouldn't do. . . . Here she comes now."

Io took a step nearer to him. "I've been looking at your books."

He returned her gaze unembarrassed. "Odds and ends," he said. "You wouldn't find much to interest you."

"On the contrary. Everything interested me. You're a mystery — and I hate mysteries."

"That's rather hard."

"Until they're solved. Perhaps I shall stay until I solve you."

'Stay longer. It wouldn't take any time at all. There's no mystery to solve." He spoke with an air of such perfect candor as compelled her belief in his sincerity.

"Perhaps you'll solve it for me. Here's Miss Van Arsdale.

Good-bye, and thank you. You'll come and see me? Or shall I come and see you?"

"Both," smiled Banneker. "That's fairest."

The pair rode away leaving the station feeling empty and unsustained. At least Banneker credited it with that feeling. He tried to get back to work, but found his routine dispiriting. He walked out into the desert, musing and aimless.

Silence fell between the two women as they rode. Once Miss Welland stopped to adjust her traveling-bag which had shifted a little in the straps.

"Is riding cross-saddle uncomfortable for you?" asked Miss Van Arsdale.

"Not in the least. I often do it at home."

Suddenly her mount, a thick-set, soft-going pony shied, almost unseating her. A gun had banged close by. Immediately there was a second report. Miss Van Arsdale dismounted, replacing a short-barreled shot-gun in its saddle-holster, stepped from the trail, and presently returned carrying a brace of plump, slate-gray birds.

"Wild dove," she said, stroking them. "You'll find them a welcome addition to a meager bill of fare."

"I should be quite content with whatever you usually have."

"Doubted," replied the other. "I live rather a frugal life. It saves trouble."

"And I'm afraid I'm going to make you trouble. But you brought it upon yourself."

"By interfering. Exactly. How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Good Heavens! You have the aplomb of fifty."

"Experience," smiled the girl, flattered.

"And the recklessness of fifteen."

"I abide by the rules of the game. And when I find myself — well, out of bounds, I make my own rules."

Miss Van Arsdale shook her firmly poised head. "It won't do. The rules are the same everywhere, for honorable people."

"Honorable!" There was a flash of resentful pride as the girl turned in the saddle to face her companion.

"I have no intention of preaching at you or of questioning you," continued the calm, assured voice. "If you are looking for sanctuary"— the fine lips smiled slightly —"though I'm sure I can't see why you should need it, this is the place. But there are rules of sanctuary, also."

"I suppose," surmised the girl, "you want to know why I don't go back into the world at once."

"No."

"Then I'll tell you."

"As you wish."

"I came West to be married."

"To Delavan Eyre?"

Again the dun pony jumped, this time because a sudden involuntary contraction of his rider's muscles had startled him. "What do you know of Delavan Eyre, Miss Van Arsdale?"

"I occasionally see a New York newspaper."

"Then you know who I am, too?"

"Yes. You are the pet of the society column paragraphers; the famous 'Io' Welland." She spoke with a curious intonation.

"Ah, you read the society news?"

"With a qualmish stomach. I see the names of those whom I used to know advertising themselves in the papers as if they had a shaving-soap or a chewing-gum to sell."

"Part of the game," returned the girl airily. "The newcomers, the climbers, would give their souls to get the place in print that we get without an effort."

"Doesn't it seem to you a bit vulgar?" asked the other.

"Perhaps. But it's the way the game is played nowadays."

"With counters which you have let the parvenues establish for you. In my day we tried to keep out of the papers."

"Clever of you," approved the girl. "The more you try to keep out, the more eager the papers are to print your picture. They're crazy over exclusiveness," she laughed.

"Speculation, pro and con, as to who is going to marry whom, and who is about to divorce whom, and whether Miss Welland's engagement to Mr. Eyre is authentic, 'as announced exclusively in this column'— more exclusiveness —; or whether —"

"It wasn't Del Eyre that I came out here to marry."

"No?"

"No. It's Carter Holmesley. Of course you know about him."

"By advertisement, also; the society-column kind."

"Really, you know, he couldn't keep out of the papers. He hates it with all his British soul. But being what he is, a prospective duke, an international poloist, and all that sort of thing, the reporters naturally swarm to him. Columns and columns; more pictures than a popular *danseuse*. And all without his lifting his hand."

"*Une mariage de reclame*," observed Miss Van Arsdale. "Is it that that constitutes his charm for you?"

Miss Van Arsdale's smile was still instinct with mockery, but there had crept into it a quality of indulgence.

"No," answered the girl. Her face became thoughtful and serious. "It's something else. He — he carried me off my feet from the moment I met him. He was drunk, too, that first time. I don't believe I've ever seen him cold sober. But it's a joyous kind of intoxication; vine-leaves and Bacchus and that sort of thing 'weave a circle 'round him thrice'— *you* know. It *is* honey-dew and the milk of Paradise to him." She laughed nervously. "And charm! It's in the very air about him. He can make me follow his lead like a little curly poodle when I'm with him."

"Were you engaged to Delavan Eyre when you met him?"

"Oh, engaged!" returned the girl fretfully. "There was never more than a sort of understanding. A *mariage de convenance* on both sides, if it ever came off. I *am* fond of Del, too. But he was South, and the other came like a whirlwind, and I'm — I'm queer about some things," she went on half shamefacedly. "I suppose I'm awfully susceptible to physical impressions. Are all girls that way? Or is that gross and — and underbred?"

"It's part of us, I expect; but we're not all so honest with ourselves. So you decided to throw over Mr. Eyre and marry your Briton."

"Well — yes. The new British Ambassador, who arrives from Japan next week, is Carty's uncle, and we were going to make

him stage-manage the wedding, you see. A sort of officially certified elopement."

"More advertisement!" said Miss Van Arsdale coldly. "Really, Miss Welland, if marriage seems to you nothing more than an opportunity to create a newspaper sensation I cannot congratulate you on your prospects."

This time her tone stung. Io Welland's eyes became sullen. But her voice was almost caressingly amiable as she said:

"Tastes differ. It is, I believe, possible to create a sensation in New York society without any newspaper publicity, and without at all meaning or wishing to. At least, it was, fifteen years ago; so I'm told."

Camilla Van Arsdale's face was white and lifeless and still, as she turned it toward the girl.

"You must have been a very precocious five-year-old," she said steadily.

"All the Olneys are precocious. My mother was an Olney, a first cousin of Mrs. Willis Enderby, you know."

"Yes; I remember now."

The malicious smile on the girl's delicate lips faded. "I wish I hadn't said that," she cried impulsively. "I hate Cousin Mabel. I always have hated her. She's a cat. And I think the way she acted in — in the — the — well, about Judge Enderby and —"

"Please!" Miss Van Arsdale's tone was peremptory. "Here is my place." She indicated a clearing with a little nest of a camp in it.

"Shall I go back?" asked Io remorsefully.

"No."

Miss Van Arsdale dismounted and, after a moment's hesitancy, the other followed her example. The hostess threw open the door and a beautiful, white-ruffed collie rushed to her with barks of joy. She held out a hand to her new guest.

"Be welcome," she said with a certain stately gravity, "for as long as you will stay."

"It might be some time," answered Io shyly. "You're tempting me."

"When is your wedding?"

"Wedding! Oh, didn't I tell you? I'm not going to marry Carter Holmesley either."

"You are not going —"

"No. The bump on my head must have settled my brain. As soon as I came to I saw how crazy it would be. That is why I don't want to go on West."

"I see. For fear of his overbearing you."

"Yes. Though I don't think he could now. I think I'm over it. Poor old Del! He's had a narrow escape from losing me. I hope he never hears of it. Placid though he is, that might stir him up."

"Then you'll go back to him?"

The girl sighed. "I suppose so. How can I tell? I'm only twenty, and it seems to me that somebody has been trying to marry me ever since I stopped petting my dolls. I'm tired of men, men, men! That's why I want to live alone and quiet for a while in the station-agent's shack."

"Then you don't consider Mr. Banneker as belonging to the tribe of men?"

"He's an official. I could always see his uniform, at need." She fell into thought. "It's a curious thing," she mused.

Miss Van Arsdale said nothing.

"This queer young cub of a station-agent of yours is strangely like Carter Holmesley, not as much in looks as in — well — atmosphere. Only, he's ever so much better-looking."

"Won't you have some tea? You must be tired," said Miss Van Arsdale politely.

## Chapter VII

Somewhere within the soul of civilized woman burns a craving for that higher power of sensation which we dub sensationalism. Girls of Io Welland's upbringing live in an atmosphere which fosters it. To outshine their rivals in the startling things which they do, always within accepted limits, is an important and exciting phase of existence. Io had run away to marry the future Duke of Carfax, partly through the charm which a reckless, headlong, and romantic personality imposed upon her, but largely for the excitement of a reckless, headlong, and romantic escapade. The tragic interposition of the wreck seemed to her present consciousness, cooled and sobered by the spacious peace of the desert, to have been providential.

Despite her disclaimer made to Banneker she felt, deep within the placid acceptances of subconsciousness, that the destruction of a train was not too much for a considerate Providence to undertake on behalf of her petted and important self. She clearly realized that she had had a narrow escape from Holmesley; that his attraction for her was transient and unsubstantial, a surface magnetism without real value or promise.

In her revulsion of feeling she thought affectionately of Delavan Eyre. There lay the safe basis of habitude, common interests, settled liking. True, he bored her at times with his unimpeachable good-nature, his easy self-assurance that everything was and always would be "all right," and nothing "worth bothering over."

If he knew of her escapade, that would at least shake him out of his soft and well-lined rut. Indeed, Io was frank enough with herself to admit that a perverse desire to explode a bomb under her imperturbable and too-assured suitor had been an element in her projected elopement. Never would that bomb explode. It would not even fizzle enough to alarm Eyre or her family. For not a soul knew of the frustrated scheme, except Holmesley and the reliable friend in Paradiso whom she was to visit; not her father, Sims Welland, traveling in Europe on business, nor her

aunt, Mrs. Thatcher Forbes, in whose charge she had been left. Ostensibly she had been going to visit the Westerleys, that was all: Mrs. Forbes's misgivings as to a twenty-year-old girl crossing the continent alone had been unavailing against Io's calm willfulness.

Well, she would go back and marry Del Eyre, and be comfortable ever after. After all, liking and comprehension were a sounder foundation for matrimony than the perishable glamour of an attraction like Holmesley's. Any sensible person would know that. She wished that she had some older and more experienced woman to talk it out with. Miss Van Arsdale, if only she knew her a little better . . .

Camilla Van Arsdale, even on so casual an acquaintance, would have told Io, reckoning with the slumbering fire in her eyes, and the sensitive and passionate turn of the lips, but still more with the subtle and significant emanation of a femininity as yet unawakened to itself, that for her to marry on the pallid expectancies of mere liking would be to invite disaster and challenge ruin.

Meantime Io wanted to rest and think.

Time enough for that was to be hers, it appeared. Her first night as a guest had been spent in a semi-enclosed porch, to which every breeze wafted the spicy and restful balm of the wet pines. Io's hot brain cooled itself in that peace. Quite with a feeling of welcome she accepted the windy downpour which came with the morning to keep her indoors, as if it were a friendly and opportune jailer. Reaction from the mental strain and the physical shock had set in. She wanted only, as she expressed it to her hostess, to "laze" for a while.

"Then this is the ideal spot for you," Miss Van Arsdale answered her. "I'm going to ride over to town."

"In this gale?" asked the surprised girl.

"Oh, I'm weather-proof. Tell Pedro not to wait luncheon for me. And keep an eye on him if you want anything fit to eat. He's the worst cook west of the plains. You'll find books, and the piano to amuse you when you get up."

She rode away, straight and supple in the saddle, and Io went

back to sleep again. Halfway to her destination, Miss Van Arsdale's woods-trained ear caught the sound of another horse's hooves, taking a short cut across a bend in the trail. To her halloo, Banneker's clear voice responded. She waited and presently he rode up to her.

"Come back with me," she invited after acknowledging his greeting.

"I was going over to see Miss Welland."

"Wait until to-morrow. She is resting."

A shade of disappointment crossed his face. "All right," he agreed. "I wanted to tell her that her messages got off all right."

"I'll tell her when I go back."

"That'll be just as well," he answered reluctantly. "How is she feeling?"

"Exhausted. She's been under severe strain."

"Oughtn't she to have a doctor? I could ride —"

"She won't listen to it. And I think her head is all right now. But she ought to have complete rest for several days."

"Well, I'm likely to be busy enough," he said simply. "The schedule is all shot to pieces, and, unless this rain lets up, we'll have more track out. What do you think of it?"

Miss Van Arsdale looked up through the thrashing pines to the rush of the gray-black clouds. "I think we're in for a siege of it," was her pronouncement.

They rode along single file in the narrow trail until they emerged into the open. Then Banneker's horse moved forward, neck and neck with the other. Miss Van Arsdale reined down her uneasy roan.

"Ban."

"Yes?"

"Have you ever seen anything like her before?"

"Only on the stage."

She smiled. "What do you think of her?"

"I hardly know how to express it," he answered frankly, though hesitantly. "She makes me think of all the poetry I've ever read."

"That's dangerous. Ban, have you any idea what kind of a girl she is?"

"What kind?" he repeated. He looked startled.

"Of course you haven't. How should you? I'm going to tell you."

"Do you know her, Miss Camilla?"

"As well as if she were my own sister. That is, I know her type. It's common enough."

"It can't be," he protested eagerly.

"Oh, yes! The type is. She is an exquisite specimen of it; that's all. Listen, Ban. Io Welland is the petted and clever and willful daughter of a rich man; a very rich man he would be reckoned out here. She lives in a world as remote from this as the moon."

"Of course. I realize that."

"It's well that you do. And she's as casual a visitant here as if she had floated down on one moonbeam and would float back on the next."

"She'll have to, to get out of here if this rain keeps up," observed the station-agent grimly.

"I wish she would," returned Miss Van Arsdale.

"Is she in your way?"

"I shouldn't mind that if I could keep her out of yours," she answered bluntly.

Banneker turned a placid and smiling face to her. "You think I'm a fool, don't you, Miss Camilla?"

"I think that Io Welland, without ill-intent at all, but with a period of idleness on her hands, is a dangerous creature to have around. She's too lovely and, I think, too restless a spirit."

"She's lovely, all right," assented Banneker.

"Well; I've warned you, Ban," returned his friend in slightly dispirited tones.

"What do you want me to do? Keep away from your place? I'll do whatever you say. But it's all nonsense."

"I dare say it is," sighed Miss Van Arsdale. "Forget that I've said it, Ban. Meddling is a thankless business."

"You could never meddle as far as I'm concerned," said

Banneker warmly. "I'm a little worried," he added thoughtfully, "about not reporting her as found to the company. What do you think?"

"Too official a question for me. You'll have to settle that for yourself."

"How long does she intend to stay?"

"I don't know. But a girl of her breeding and habits would hardly settle herself on a stranger for very long unless a point were made of urging her."

"And you won't do that?"

"I certainly shall not!"

"No; I suppose not. You've been awfully good to her."

"Hospitality to the shipwrecked," smiled Miss Van Arsdale as she crossed the track toward the village.

Late afternoon, darkening into wilder winds and harsher rain, brought the hostess back to her lodge dripping and weary. On a bearskin before the smouldering fire lay the girl, her fingers intertwined behind her head, her eyes half closed and dreamy. Without directly responding to the other's salutation she said:

"Miss Van Arsdale, will you be very good to me?"

"What is it?"

"I'm tired," said Io. "So tired!"

"Stay, of course," responded the hostess, answering the implication heartily, "as long as you will."

"Only two or three days, until I recover the will to do something. You're awfully kind." Io looked very young and childlike, with her languid, mobile face irradiated by the half-light of the fire. "Perhaps you'll play for me sometime."

"Of course. Now, if you like. As soon as the chill gets out of my hands."

"Thank you. And sing?" suggested the girl diffidently.

A fierce contraction of pain marred the serenity of the older woman's face. "No," she said harshly. "I sing for no one."

"I'm sorry," murmured the girl.

"What have you been doing all day?" asked Miss Van Arsdale, holding out her hands toward the fire.

"Resting. Thinking. Scaring myself with bogy-thoughts of

what I've escaped." Io smiled and sighed. "I hadn't known how worn out I was until I woke up this morning. I don't think I ever before realized the meaning of refuge."

"You'll recover from the need of it soon enough," promised the other. She crossed to the piano. "What kind of music do you want? No; don't tell me. I should be able to guess." Half turning on the bench she gazed speculatively at the lax figure on the rug. "Chopin, I think. I've guessed right? Well, I don't think I shall play you Chopin to-day. You don't need that kind of —of — well, excitation."

Musing for a moment over a soft mingling of chords she began with a little ripple of melody, MacDowell's lovely, hurrying, buoyant "Improvisation," with its æolian vibrancies, its light, bright surges of sound, sinking at the last into cradled restfulness. Without pause or transition she passed on to Grieg; the wistful, remote appeal of the strangely misnamed "Erotique," plaintive, solemn, and in the fulfillment almost hymnal: the brusque pursuing minors of the wedding music, and the diamond-shower of notes of the sun-path song, bleak, piercing, Northern sunlight imprisoned in melody. Then, the majestic swing of Åse's death-chant, glorious and mystical.

"Are you asleep?" asked the player, speaking through the chords.

"No," answered Io's tremulous voice. "I'm being very unhappy. I love it!"

Bang! It was a musical detonation, followed by a volley of chords and then a wild, swirling waltz; and Miss Van Arsdale jumped up and stood over her guest. "There!" she said. "That's better than letting you pamper yourself with the indulgence of unhappiness."

"But I want to be unhappy," pouted Io. "I want to be pampered."

"Naturally. You always will be, I expect, as long as there are men in the world to do your bidding. However, I must see to supper."

So for two days Io Welland lolled and lazed and listened to Miss Van Arsdale's music, or read, or took little walks between

showers. No further mention was made by her hostess of the circumstances of the visit. She was a reticent woman; almost saturnine, Io decided, though her perfect and effortless courtesy preserved her from being antipathetic to any one beneath her own roof. How much her silence as to the unusual situation was inspired by consideration for her guest, how much due to natural reserve, Io could not estimate.

A little less reticence would have been grateful to her as the hours spun out and she felt her own spirit expand slowly in the calm. It was she who introduced the subject of Banneker.

"Our quaint young station-agent seems to have abandoned his responsibilities so far as I'm concerned," she observed.

"Because he hasn't come to see you?"

"Yes. He said he would."

"I told him not to."

"I see," said Io, after thinking it over. "Is he a little — just a wee, little bit queer in his head?"

"He's one of the sanest persons I've ever known. And I want him to stay so."

"I see again," stated the girl.

"So you thought him a bit unbalanced? That *is* amusing." That the hostess meant the adjective in good faith was proved by her quiet laughter.

Io regarded her speculatively and with suspicion. "He asked the same about me, I suppose." Such was her interpretation of the laugh.

"But he gave you credit for being only temporarily deranged."

"Either he or I ought to be up for examination by a medical board," stated the girl poutingly. "One of us must be crazy. The night that I stole his molasses pie — it was pretty awful pie, but I was starved — I stumbled over something in the darkness and fell into it with an awful clatter. What do you suppose it was?"

"I think I could guess," smiled the other.

"Not unless you knew. Personally I couldn't believe it. It felt like a boat, and it rocked like a boat, and there were the seats

and the oars. I could feel them. A steel boat! Miss Van Arsdale, it isn't reasonable."

"Why isn't it reasonable?'

"I looked on the map in his room and there isn't so much as a mud-puddle within miles and miles and miles. Is there?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then what does he want of a steel boat?"

"Ask him."

"It might stir him up. They get violent if you question their pet lunacies, don't they?"

"It's quite simple. Ban is just an incurable romanticist. He loves the water. And his repository of romance is the catalogue of Sears, Roebuck & Co. When the new issue came, with an entrancing illustration of a fully equipped steel boat, he simply couldn't stand it. He had to have one, to remind him that some day he would be going back to the coast lagoons. . . . Does that sound to you like a fool?"

"No; it sounds delicious," declared the girl with a ripple of mirth. "What a wonderful person! I'm going over to see him to-morrow. May I?"

"My dear; I have no control over your actions."

"Have you made any other plans for me to-morrow morning?" inquired Miss Welland in a prim and social tone, belied by the dancing light in her eyes.

"I've told you that he was romantic," warned the other.

"What higher recommendation could there be? I shall sit in the boat with him and talk nautical language. Has he a yachting cap? Oh, do tell me that he has a yachting cap!"

Miss Van Arsdale, smiling, shook her head, but her eyes were troubled. There was compunction in Io's next remark.

"I'm really going over to see about accommodations. Sooner or later I must face the music — meaning Carty. I'm fit enough now, thanks to you."

"Wouldn't an Eastern trip be safer?" suggested her hostess.

"An Eastern trip would be easier. But I've made my break, and it's in the rules, as I understand them, that I've got to see it

through. If he can get me now"— she gave a little shrug — "but he can't. I've come to my senses."

Sunlight pale, dubious, filtering through the shaken cloud veils, ushered in the morning. Meager of promise though it was, Io's spirits brightened. Declining the offer of a horse in favor of a pocket compass, she set out afoot, not taking the trail, but forging straight through the heavy forest for the line of desert. Around her, brisk and busy flocks of piñon jays darted and twittered confidentially. The warm spice of the pines was sweet in her nostrils. Little stirrings and rustlings just beyond the reach of vision delightfully and provocatively suggested the interest which she was inspiring by her invasion among the lesser denizens of the place. The sweetness and intimacy of an unknown life surrounded her. She sang happily as she strode, lithe and strong and throbbing with unfulfilled energies and potencies, through the springtide of the woods.

But when she emerged upon the desert, she fell silent. A spaciousness as of endless vistas enthralled and, a little, awed her. On all sides were ranged the disordered ranks of the cacti, stricken into immobility in the very act of reconstituting their columns, so that they gave the effect of a discord checked on the verge of its resolution into form and harmony, yet with a weird and distorted beauty of its own. From a little distance, there came a murmur of love-words. Io moved softly forward, peering curiously, and from the arc of a wide curving ocatilla two wild doves sprang, leaving the branch all aquiver. Bolder than his companions of the air, a cactus owl, perched upon the highest column of a great green candelabrum, viewed her with a steady detachment, "sleepless, with cold, commemorative eyes." The girl gave back look for look, into the big, hard, unwavering circles.

"You're a funny little bird," said she. "Say something!"

Like his congener of the hortatory poem, the owl held his peace.

"Perhaps you're a stuffed little bird," said Io, "and this not a real desert at all, but a National Park or something, full of educational specimens."

She walked past the occupant of the cactus, and his head,

turning, followed her with the slow, methodical movement of a toy mechanism.

"You give me a crick in my neck," protested the intruder plaintively. "Now, I'll step over behind you and you'll *have* to move or stop watching me."

She walked behind the watcher. The eyes continued to hold her in direct range.

"Now," said Io, "I know where the idea for that horrid advertisement that always follows you with its finger came from. However, I'll fix you."

She fetched a deliberate circle. The bird's eyes followed her without cessation. Yet his feet and body remained motionless. Only the head had turned. That had made a complete revolution.

"This is a very queer desert," gasped Io. "It's bewitched. Or am I? Now, I'm going to walk once more around you, little owl, or mighty magician, whichever you are. And after I've completely turned your head, you'll fall at my feet. Or else . . ."

Again she walked around the feathered center of the circle. The head followed her, turning with a steady and uninterrupted motion, on its pivot. Io took a silver dime from her purse.

"Heaven save us from the powers of evil!" she said appreciatively. "Aroint thee, witch!"

She threw the coin at the cactus.

"Chrr-rr-rrum!" burbled the owl, and flew away.

"I'm dizzy," said Io. "I wonder if the owl is an omen and whether the other inhabitants of this desert are like him; however much you turn their heads, they won't fall for you. Charms and counter-charms!...Be a good child, Io," she admonished herself. "Haven't you got yourself into enough trouble with your deviltries? I can't help it," she defended herself. "When I see a new and interesting specimen, I've just *got* to investigate its nature and habits. It's an inherited scientific spirit, I suppose. And he is new, and awfully interesting — even if he is only a station-agent." Wherefrom it will be perceived that her thoughts had veered from the cactus owl, to another perplexing local phenomenon.

The glaring line of the railroad right-of-way rose before her feet, a discordant note of rigidity and order in the confused prodigality of desert growth. Io turned away from it, but followed its line until she reached the station. No sign of life greeted her. The door was locked, and the portable house unresponsive to her knocking. Presently, however, she heard the steady click of the telegraph instrument and, looking through the half-open office window, saw Banneker absorbed in his work.

"Good-morning," she called.

Without looking up he gave back her greeting in an absent echo.

"As you didn't come to see me, I've come to see you," was her next attempt.

Did he nod? Or had he made no motion at all?

"I've come to ask important questions about trains," she pursued, a little aggrieved by his indifference to her presence.

No reply from the intent worker.

"And 'tell sad stories of the death of kings,'" she quoted with a fairy chuckle. She thought that she saw a small contortion pass over his features, only to be banished at once. He had retired within the walls of that impassive and inscrutable reserve which minor railroad officials can at will erect between themselves and the lay public. Only the broken rhythms of the telegraph ticker relieved the silence and furnished the justification.

A little piqued but more amused, for she was far too confident of herself to feel snubbed, the girl waited smilingly. Presently she said in silken tones:

"When you're quite through and can devote a little attention to insignificant me, I shall perhaps be sitting on the sunny corner of the platform, or perhaps I shall be gone forever."

But she was not gone when, ten minutes later, Banneker came out. He looked tired.

"You know, you weren't very polite to me," she remarked, glancing at him slantwise as he stood before her.

If she expected apologies, she was disappointed, and perhaps thought none the less of him for his dereliction.

"There's trouble all up and down the line," he said. "Nothing

like a schedule left west of Allbright. Two passenger trains have come through, though. Would you like to see a paper? It's in my office."

"Goodness, no! Why should I want a newspaper here? I haven't time for it. I want to see the world" — she swept a little, indicating hand about her; "all that I can take in in a day."

"A day?" he echoed.

"Yes. I'm going to-morrow."

"That's as may be. Ten to one there's no space to be had."

"Surely you can get something for me. A section will do if you can't get a stateroom."

He smiled. "The president of the road might get a stateroom. I doubt if anybody else could even land an upper. Of course I'll do my best. But it's a question when there'll be another train through."

"What ails your road?" she demanded indignantly. "Is it just stuck together with glue?"

"You've never seen this desert country when it springs a leak. It can develop a few hundred Niagaras at the shortest notice of any place I know."

"But it isn't leaking now," she objected.

He turned his face to the softly diffused sunlight. "To be continued. The storm isn't over yet, according to the way I feel about it. Weather reports say so, too."

"Then take me for a walk!" she cried. "I'm tired of rain and I want to go over and lean against that lovely white mountain."

"Well, it's only sixty miles away," he answered. "Perhaps you'd better take some grub along or you might get hungry."

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"This is my busy morning. If it were afternoon, now —"

"Very well. Since you are so urgent, I *will* stay to luncheon. I'll even get it up myself if you'll let me into the shack."

"That's a go!" said Banneker heartily. "What about your horse?"

"I walked over."

"No; did you?" He turned thoughtful, and his next observation had a slightly troubled ring. "Have you got a gun?"

"A gun? Oh, you mean a pistol. No; I haven't. Why should I?"

He shook his head. "This is no time to be out in the open without a gun. They had a dance at the Sick Coyote in Manzanita last night, and there'll be some tough specimens drifting along homeward all day."

"Do you carry a gun?"

"I would if I were going about with you."

"Then you can loan me yours to go home with this afternoon," she said lightly.

"Oh, I'll take you back. Just now I've got some odds and ends that will take a couple of hours to clear up. You'll find plenty to read in the shack, such as it is."

Thus casually dismissed, Io murmured a "Thank you" which was not as meek as it sounded, and withdrew to rummage among the canned edibles drawn from the inexhaustible stock of Sears-Roebuck. Having laid out a selection, housewifely, and looked to the oil stove derived from the same source, she turned with some curiosity to the mental pabulum with which this strange young hermit had provided himself. Would this, too, bear the mail-order imprint and testify to mail-order standards? At first glance the answer appeared to be affirmative. The top shelf of the home-made case sagged with the ineffable slusheries of that most popular and pious of novelists, Harvey Wheelwright. Near by, "How to Behave on All Occasions" held forth its unimpeachable precepts, while a little beyond, "Botany Made Easy" and "The Perfect Letter Writer" proffered further aid to the aspiring mind. Improvement, stark, blatant Improvement, advertised itself from that culturous and reeking compartment. But just below — Io was tempted to rub her eyes — stood Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy"; a Browning, complete; that inimitably jocund fictional prank, Frederic's "March Hares," together with the same author's fine and profoundly just "Damnation of Theron Ware"; Taylor's translation of Faust; "The [broken-backed] Egoist"; "Lavengro" (Io touched its magic pages with tender fingers), and a fat, faded, reddish volume so worn and obscured that she at once took it down and made

explorative entry. She was still deep in it when the owner arrived.

"Have you found enough to keep you amused?"

She looked up from the pages and seemed to take him all in anew before answering. "Hardly the word. Bewildered would be nearer the feeling."

"It's a queerish library, I suppose," he said apologetically.

"If I believed in dual personality —" she began; but broke off to hold up the bulky veteran. "Where did you get 'The Undying Voices'?"

"Oh, that's a windfall. What a bully title for a collection of the great poetries, isn't it!"

She nodded, one caressing hand on the open book, the other propping her chin as she kept the clear wonder of her eyes upon him.

"It makes you think of singers making harmony together in a great open space. I'd like to know the man who made the selections," he concluded.

"What kind of a windfall?" she asked.

"A real one. Pullman travelers sometimes prop their windows open with books. You can see the window-mark on the cover of this one. I found it two miles out, beside the right-of-way. There was no name in it, so I kept it. It's the book I read most except one."

"What's the one?"

He laughed, holding up the still more corpulent Sears-Roebuck catalogue.

"Ah," said she gravely. "That accounts, I suppose, for the top shelf."

"Yes, mostly."

"Do you like them? The Conscientious Improvers, I mean?"

"I think they're bunk."

"Then why did you get them?"

"Oh, I suppose I was looking for something," he returned; and though his tone was careless, she noticed for the first time a tinge of self-consciousness.

"Did you find it there?"

"No. It isn't there."

"Here?" She laid both hands on the "windfall."

His face lighted subtly.

"It *is* there, isn't it! If one has the sense to get it out."

"I wonder," mused the girl. And again, "I wonder." She rose, and taking out "March Hares" held it up. "I could hardly believe this when I saw it. Did it also drop out of a car window?"

"No. I never heard of that until I wrote for it. I wrote to a Boston bookstore that I'd heard about and told 'em I wanted two books to cheer up a fool with the blues, and another to take him into a strange world — and keep the change out of five dollars. They sent me 'The Bab Ballads' and this, and 'Lavengro.'"

"Oh, how I'd like to see that letter! If the bookstore has an ounce of real bookitude about it, they've got it preserved in lavender! And what do you think of 'March Hares'?"

"Did you ever read any of the works of Harvey Wheelwright?" he questioned in turn.

"Now," thought Io, "he is going to compare Frederic to Wheelwright, and I shall abandon him to his fate forever. So here's his chance . . . I have," she replied aloud.

"It's funny," ruminated Banneker. "Mr. Wheelwright writes about the kind of things that might happen any day, and probably do happen, and yet you don't believe a word of it. 'March Hares' — well, it just couldn't happen; but what do you care while you're in it! It seems realer than any of the dull things outside it. That's the literary part of it, I suppose, isn't it?"

"That's the magic of it," returned Io, with a little, half-suppressed crow of delight. "Are you magic, too, Mr. Banneker?"

"Me? I'm hungry," said he.

"Forgive the cook!" she cried. "But just one thing more. Will you lend me the poetry book?"

"It's all marked up," he objected, flushing.

"Are you afraid that I'll surprise your inmost secrets?" she taunted. "They'd be safe. I can be close-mouthed, even though I've been chattering like a sparrow."

"Take it, of course," he said. "I suppose I've marked all the wrong things."

"So far," she laughed, "you're batting one hundred per cent as a literary critic." She poured coffee into a tin cup and handed it to him. "What do you think of my coffee?"

He tasted it consideringly; then gave a serious verdict. "Pretty bad."

"Really! I suppose it isn't according to the mail-order book recipe."

"It's muddy and it's weak."

"Are you always so frank in your expression of views?"

"Well, you asked me."

"Would you answer as plainly whatever I asked you?"

"Certainly. I'd have too much respect for you not to."

She opened wide eyes at this. Then provocatively: "What do you think of me, Mr. Banneker?"

"I can't answer that."

"Why not?" she teased.

"I don't know you well enough to give an opinion."

"You know me as well as you ever will."

"Very likely."

"Well, a snap judgment, for what it's worth....What are you doing there?"

"Making more coffee."

Io stamped her foot. "You're the most enraging man I ever met."

"It's quite unintentional," he replied patiently, but with no hint of compunction. "You may drink yours and I'll drink mine."

"You're only making it worse!"

"Very well; then I'll drink yours if you like."

"And say it's good."

"But what's the use?"

"And say it's good," insisted Io.

"It's marvelous," agreed her unsmiling host.

Far from being satisfied with words and tone, which were correctness itself, Io was insensately exasperated.

"You're treating me like a child," she charged.

"How do you want me to treat you?"

"As a woman," she flashed, and was suddenly appalled to feel the blood flush incredibly to her cheeks.

If he noted the phenomenon, he gave no sign, simply assenting with his customary equanimity. During the luncheon she chattered vaguely. She was in two minds about calling off the projected walk. As he set aside his half-emptied cup of coffee — not even tactful enough to finish it out of compliment to her brew — Banneker said:

"Up beyond the turn yonder the right-of-way crosses an arroyo. I want to take a look at it. We can cut through the woods to get there. Are you good for three miles?"

"For a hundred!" cried Io.

The wine of life was potent in her veins.

## Chapter VIII

Before the walk was over, Io knew Banneker as she had never before, in her surrounded and restricted life, known any man; the character and evolution and essence of him. Yet with all his frankness, the rare, simple, and generous outgiving of a naturally rather silent nature yielding itself to an unrecognized but overmastering influence, he retained the charm of inner mystery. Her sudden understanding of him still did not enable her to place him in any category of life as she knew it to be arranged.

The revelation had come about through her description of her encounter with the queer and attentive bird of the desert.

"Oh," said Banneker. "You've been interviewing a cactus owl."

"Did he unwind his neck carefully and privately after I had gone?"

"No," returned Banneker gravely. "He just jumped in the air and his body spun around until it got back to its original relation."

"How truly fascinating! Have you seen him do it?"

"Not actually seen. But often in the evenings I've heard them buzzing as they unspin the day's wind-up. During the day, you see, they make as many as ten or fifteen revolutions until their eyes bung out. Reversing makes them very dizzy, and if you are around when they're doing it, you can often pick them up off the sand."

"And doesn't it ever make *you* dizzy? All this local lore, I mean, that you carry around in your head?"

"It isn't much of a strain to a practiced intellect," he deprecated. "If you're interested in natural history, there's the Sidehill Wampus —"

"Yes; I know. I've been West before, thank you! Pardon my curiosity, but are all you creatures of the desert queer and inexplicable?"

"Not me," he returned promptly if ungrammatically, "if you're looking in my direction."

"I'll admit that I find you as interesting as the owl — almost. And quite as hard to understand."

"Nobody ever called me queer ; not to my face."

"But you are, you know. You oughtn't to be here at all."

"Where ought I to be?"

"How can I answer that riddle without knowing where you have been? Are you Ulysses —"

"'Knowing cities and the hearts of men,'" he answered, quick to catch the reference. "No ; not the cities, certainly, and very little of the men."

"There, you see!" she exclaimed plaintively. "You're up on a classical reference like a college man. No ; not like the college men I know, either. They are too immersed in their football and rowing and too afraid to be thought highbrow, to confess to knowing anything about Ulysses. What was your college?"

"This," he said, sweeping a hand around the curve of the horizon.

"And in any one else," she retorted, "that would be priggish as well as disingenuous."

"I suppose I know what you mean. Out here, when a man doesn't explain himself, they think it's for some good reason of his own, or bad reason, more likely. In either case, they don't ask questions."

"I really beg your pardon, Mr. Banneker!"

"No ; that isn't what I meant at all. If you're interested, I'd like to have you know about me. It isn't much, though."

"You'll think me prying," she objected.

"I think you a sort of friend of a day, who is going away very soon leaving pleasant memories," he answered, smiling. "A butterfly visit. I'm not much given to talking, but if you'd like it —"

"Of course I should like it."

So he sketched for her his history. His mother he barely remembered ; "dark, and quite beautiful, I believe, though that might be only a child's vision ; my father rarely spoke of her, but I think all the emotional side of his life was buried with her." The father, an American of Danish ancestry, had been ousted

from the chair of Sociology in old, conservative Havenden College, as the logical result of his writings which, because they shrewdly and clearly pointed out certain ulcerous spots in the economic and social system, were denounced as "radical" by a Board of Trustees honestly devoted to Business Ideals. Having a small income of his own, the ex-Professor decided upon a life of investigatory vagrancy, with special reference to studies, at first hand, of the voluntarily unemployed. Not knowing what else to do with the only child of his marriage, he took the boy along. Contemptuous of, rather than embittered against, an academic system which had dispensed with his services because it was afraid of the light — "When you cast a light, they see only the resultant shadows," was one of his sayings which had remained with Banneker — he had resolved to educate the child himself.

Their life was spent frugally in cities where they haunted libraries, or, sumptuously, upon the open road where a modest supply of ready cash goes a long way. Young Banneker's education, after the routine foundation, was curiously heterodox, but he came through it with his intellectual digestion unimpaired and his mental appetite avid. By example he had the competent self-respect and unmistakable bearing of a gentleman, and by careful precept the speech of a liberally educated man. When he was seventeen, his father died of a twenty-four hours' pneumonia, leaving the son not so much stricken as bewildered, for their relations had been comradely rather than affectionate. For a time it was a question whether the youngster, drifting from casual job to casual job, would not degenerate into a veritable hobo, for he had drunk deep of the charm of the untrammeled and limitless road. Want touched him, but lightly; for he was naturally frugal and hardy. He got a railroad job by good luck, and it was not until he had worked himself into a permanency that his father's lawyers found and notified him of the possession of a small income, one hundred dollars per annum of which, they informed him, was to be expended by them upon such books as they thought suitable to his circumstances, upon information provided by the deceased, the remainder to be at his disposal.

Though quite unauthorized to proffer advice, as they honorably stated, they opined that the heir's wisest course would be to prepare himself at once for college, the income being sufficient to take him through, with care — and they were, his Very Truly, Cobb & Morse.

Banneker had not the smallest idea of cooping up his mind in a college. As to future occupation, his father had said nothing that was definite. His thesis was that observation and thought concerning men and their activities, pointed and directed by intimate touch with what others had observed and set down — that is, through books — was the gist of life. Any job which gave opportunity or leisure for this was good enough. Livelihood was but a garment, at most; life was the body beneath. Furthermore, young Banneker would find, so his senior had assured him, that he possessed an open sesame to the minds of the really intelligent wheresoever he might encounter them, in the form of a jewel which he must keep sedulously untarnished and bright. What was that? asked the boy. His speech and bearing of a cultivated man.

Young Banneker found that it was almost miraculously true. Wherever he went, he established contacts with people who interested him and whom he interested: here a brilliant, doubting, perturbed clergyman, slowly dying of tuberculosis in the desert; there a famous geologist from Washington who, after a night of amazing talk with the young prodigy while awaiting a train, took him along on a mountain exploration; again an artist and his wife who were painting the arid and colorful glories of the waste places. From these and others he got much; but not friendship or permanent associations. He did not want them. He was essentially, though unconsciously, a lone spirit; so his listener gathered. Advancement could have been his in the line of work which had by chance adopted him; but he preferred small, out-of-the-way stations, where he could be with his books and have room to breathe. So here he was at Manzanita. That was all there was to it. Nothing very mysterious or remarkable about it, was there?

Io smiled in return. "What is your name?" she asked.

"Errol. But every one calls me Ban."

"Haven't you ever told this to any one before?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why should I?"

"I don't know really," hesitated the girl, "except that it seems almost inhuman to keep one's self so shut off."

"It's nobody else's business."

"Yet you've told it to me. That's very charming of you."

"You said you'd be interested."

"So I am. It's an extraordinary life, though you don't seem to think so."

"But I don't want to be extraordinary."

"Of course you do," she refuted promptly. "To be ordinary is — is — well, it's like being a dust-colored beetle." She looked at him queerly. "Doesn't Miss Van Arsdale know all this?"

"I don't see how she could. I've never told her."

"And she's never asked you anything?"

"Not a word. I don't quite see Miss Camilla asking any one questions about themselves. Did she ask you?"

The girl's color deepened almost imperceptibly. "You're right," she said. "There's a standard of breeding that we up-to-date people don't attain. But I'm at least intelligent enough to recognize it. You reckon her as a friend, don't you?"

"Why, yes; I suppose so."

"Do you suppose you'd ever come to reckon me as one?" she asked, half bantering, half wistful.

"There won't be time. You're running away."

"Perhaps I might write you. I think I'd like to."

"Would you?" he murmured. "Why?"

"You ought to be greatly flattered," she reproved him. "Instead you shoot a 'why' at me. Well; because you've got something I haven't got. And when I find anything new like that, I always try to get some of it for myself."

"I don't know what it could be, but —"

"Call it your philosophy of life. Your contentment. Or is it only detachment? That can't last, you know."

He turned to her, vaguely disturbed as by a threat. "Why not?"

"You're too — well, distinctive. You're too rare and beautiful a specimen. You'll be grabbed." She laughed softly.

"Who'll grab me?"

"How should I know? Life, probably. Grab you and dry you up and put you in a case like the rest of us."

"Perhaps that's why I like to stay out here. At least I can be myself."

"Is that your fondest ambition?"

However much he may have been startled by the swift stab, he gave no sign of hurt in his reply.

"Call it the line of least resistance. In any case, I shouldn't like to be grabbed and dried up."

"Most of us are grabbed and catalogued from our birth, and eventually dried up and set in our proper places."

"Not you, certainly."

"Because you haven't seen me in my shell. That's where I mostly live. I've broken out for a time."

"Don't you like it outside, Butterfly?" he queried with a hint of playful caress in his voice.

"I like that name for myself," she returned quickly. "Though a butterfly couldn't return to its chrysalis, no matter how much it wanted to, could it? But you may call me that, since we're to be friends."

"Then you do like it outside your shell."

"It's exhilarating. But I suppose I should find it too rough for my highly sensitized skin in the long run. . . . Are you going to write to me if I write to you?"

"What about? That Number Six came in making bad steam, and that a westbound freight, running extra, was held up on the siding at Marchand for half a day?"

"Is that all you have to write about?"

Banneker bethought himself of the very private dossier in his office. "No; it isn't."

"You *could* write in a way all your own. Have you ever written anything for publication?"

"No. That is — well — I don't really know." He told her about Gardner and the description of the wreck.

"How did you happen to do that?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, I write a lot of things and put them away and forget them."

"Show me," she wheedled. "I'd love to see them."

He shook his head. "They wouldn't interest you." The words were those of an excuse. But in the tone was finality.

"I don't think you're very responsive," she complained. "I'm awfully interested in you and your affairs, and you won't play back the least bit."

They walked on in silence for a space. He had, she reflected, a most disconcerting trick of silence, of ignoring quite without embarrassment leads, which in her code imperatively called for return. Annoyance stirred within her, and the eternal feline which is a component part of the eternal feminine asserted itself.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you are afraid of me."

"No; I'm not."

"By that you mean 'Why should I be'?"

"Something of the sort."

"Didn't Miss Van Arsdale warn you against me?"

"How did you know that?" he asked, staring.

"A solemn warning not to fall in love with me?" pursued the girl calmly.

He stopped short. "She told you that she had said something to me?"

"Don't be idiotic! Of course she didn't."

"Then how did you know?" he persisted.

"How does one snake know what another snake will do?" she retorted. "Being of the same —"

"Wait a moment. I don't like that word 'snake' in connection with Miss Van Arsdale."

"Though you're willing to accept it as applying to me. I believe you are trying to quarrel with me," accused Io. "I only meant that, being a woman, I can make a guess at what another woman would do in any given conditions. And she did it!" she concluded in triumph.

"No; she didn't. Not in so many words. But you're very clever."

"Say, rather, that *you* are very stupid," was the disdainful retort. "So you're not going to fall in love with me?"

"Of course not," answered Bånneker in the most cheerfully commonplace of tones.

Once embarked upon this primrose path, which is always an imperceptible but easy down-slope, Io went farther than she had intended. "Why not?" she challenged.

"Brass buttons," said Banneker concisely.

She flushed angrily. "You *can* be rather a beast, can't you!"

"A beast? Just for reminding you that the Atkinson & St. Philip station-agent at Manzanita does not include in his official duties that of presuming to fall in love with chance passengers who happen to be more or less in his care."

"Very proper and official! Now," added the girl in a different manner, "let's stop talking nonsense, and do you tell me one thing honestly. Do you feel that it would be presumption?"

"To fall in love with you?"

"Leave that part of it out; I put my question stupidly. I'm really curious to know whether you feel any — any difference between your station and mine."

"Do you?"

"Yes; I do," she answered honestly, "when I think of it. But you make it very hard for me to remember it when I'm with you."

"Well, I don't," he said. "I suppose I'm a socialist in all matters of that kind. Not that I've ever given much thought to them. You don't have to out here."

"No; you wouldn't. I don't know that *you* would have to anywhere. . . . Are we almost home?"

"Three minutes' more walking. Tired?"

"Not a bit. You know," she added, "I really would like it if you'd write me once in a while. There's something here I'd like to keep a hold on. It's tonic. I'll *make* you write me." She flashed a smile at him.

"How?"

"By sending you books. You'll have to acknowledge them."

"No. I couldn't take them. I'd have to send them back."

"You wouldn't let me send you a book or two just as a friendly memento?" she cried, incredulous.

"I don't take anything from anybody," he retorted doggedly.

"Ah; that's small-minded," she accused. "That's ungenerous. I wouldn't think that of you."

He strode along in moody thought for a few paces. Presently he turned to her a rigid face. "If you had ever had to accept food to keep you alive, you'd understand."

For a moment she was shocked and sorry. Then her tact asserted itself. "But I have," she said readily, "all my life. Most of us do."

The hard muscles around his mouth relaxed. "You remind me," he said, "that I'm not as real a socialist as I thought. Nevertheless, that rankles in my memory. When I got my first job, I swore I'd never accept anything from anybody again. One of the passengers on your train tried to tip me a hundred dollars."

"He must have been a fool," said Io scornfully.

Banneker held open the station-door for her. "I've got to send a wire or two," said he. "Take a look at this. It may give some news about general railroad conditions." He handed her the newspaper which had arrived that morning.

When he came out again, the station was empty.

Io was gone. So was the newspaper.

## Chapter IX

Deep in work at her desk, Camilla Van Arsdale noted, with the outer tentacles of her mind, slow footsteps outside and a stir of air that told of the door being opened. Without lifting her head she called:

"You'll find towels and a bathrobe in the passageway."

There was no reply. Miss Van Arsdale twisted in her chair, gave one look, rose and strode to the threshold where Io Welland stood rigid and still.

"What is it?" she demanded sharply.

The girl's hands gripped a folded newspaper. She lifted it as if for Miss Van Arsdale's acceptance, then let it fall to the floor. Her throat worked, struggling for utterance, as it might be against the pressure of invisible fingers.

"The beast! Oh, the beast!" she whispered.

The older woman threw an arm over her shoulders and led her to the big chair before the fireplace. Io let herself be thrust into it, stiff and unyielding as a manikin. Any other woman but Camilla Van Arsdale would have asked questions. She went more directly to the point. Picking up the newspaper she opened it. Halfway across an inside page ran the explanation of Io's collapse.

BRITON'S BEAUTIFUL FIANCÉE LOST

read the caption, in the glaring vulgarity of extra-heavy type, and below;

*Ducal Heir Offers Private Reward to Dinner Party of Friends*

After an estimating look at the girl, who sat quite still with hot, blurred eyes, Miss Van Arsdale carefully read the article through.

"Here is advertising enough to satisfy the greediest appetite for print," she remarked grimly.

"He's on one of his brutal drunks." The words seemed to grit

in the girl's throat. "I wish he were dead! Oh, I wish he were dead!"

Miss Van Arsdale laid hold on her shoulders and shook her hard. "Listen to me, Irene Welland. You're on the way to hysterics or some such foolishness. I won't have it! Do you understand? Are you listening to me?"

"I'm listening. But it won't make any difference what you say."

"Look at me. Don't stare into nothingness that way. Have you read this?"

"Enough of it. It ends everything."

"I should hope so, indeed. My dear!" The woman's voice changed and softened. "You haven't found that you cared for him, after all, more than you thought? It isn't that?"

"No; it isn't that. It's the beastliness of the whole thing. It's the disgrace."

Miss Van Arsdale turned to the paper again.

"Your name isn't given."

"It might as well be. As soon as it gets back to New York, every one will know."

"If I read correctly between the lines of this scurrilous thing, Mr. Holmesley gave what was to have been his bachelor dinner, took too much to drink, and suggested that every man there go on a separate search for the lost bride offering two thousand dollars reward for the one who found her. Apparently it was to have been quite private, but it leaked out. There's a hint that he had been drinking heavily for some days."

"My fault," declared Io feverishly. "He told me once that if ever I played anything but fair with him, he'd go to the devil the quickest way he could."

"Then he's a coward," pronounced Miss Van Arsdale vigorously.

"What am I? I didn't play fair with him. I practically jilted him without even letting him know why."

Miss Van Arsdale frowned. "Didn't you send him word?"

"Yes. I telegraphed him. I told him I'd write and explain. I haven't written. How could I explain? What was there to say?

But I ought to have said something. Oh, Miss Van Arsdale, why didn't I write!"

"But you did intend to go on and face him and have it out. You told me that."

A faint tinge of color relieved the white rigidity of Io's face. "Yes," she agreed. "I did mean it. Now it's too late and I'm disgraced."

"Don't be melodramatic. And don't waste yourself in self-pity. To-morrow you'll see things clearer, after you've slept."

"Sleep? I couldn't." She pressed both hands to her temples, lifting tragic and lustrous eyes to her companion. "I think my head is going to burst from trying not to think."

After some hesitancy Miss Van Arsdale went to a wall-cabinet, took out a phial, shook into her hand two little pellets, and returned the phial, carefully locking the cabinet upon it.

"Take a hot bath," she directed. "Then I'm going to give you just a little to eat. And then these." She held out the drug.

Io acquiesced dully.

Early in the morning, before the first forelight of dawn had started the birds to prophetic chirpings, the recluse heard light movements in the outer room. Throwing on a robe she went in to investigate. On the bearskin before the flickering fire sat Io, an apparition of soft curves.

"D — d — don't make a light," she whimpered. "I've been crying."

"That's good. The best thing you could do."

"I want to go home," wailed Io.

"That's good, too. Though perhaps you'd better wait a little. Why, in particular do you want to go home?"

"I w-w-w-want to m-m-marry Delavan Eyre."

A quiver of humor trembled about the corners of Camilla Van Arsdale's mouth. "Echoes of remorse," she commented.

"No. It isn't remorse. I want to feel safe, secure. I'm afraid of things. I want to go to-morrow. Tell Mr. Banneker he must arrange it for me."

"We'll see. Now you go back to bed and sleep."

"I'd rather sleep here," said Io. "The fire is so friendly." She curled herself into a little soft ball.

Her hostess threw a coverlet over her and returned to her own room.

When light broke, there was no question of Io's going that day, even had accommodations been available. A clogging lassitude had descended upon her, the reaction of cumulative nervous stress, anesthetizing her will, her desires, her very limbs. She was purposeless, ambitionless, except to lie and rest and seek for some resolution of peace out of the tangled web wherein her own willfulness had involved her.

"The best possible thing," said Camilla Van Arsdale. "I'll write your people that you are staying on for a visit."

"Yes; they won't mind. They're used to my vagaries. It's awfully good of you."

At noon came Banneker to see Miss Welland. Instead he found a curiously reticent Miss Van Arsdale. Miss Welland was not feeling well and could not be seen.

"Not her head again, is it?" asked Banneker, alarmed.

"More nerves, though the head injury probably contributed."

"Oughtn't I to get a doctor?"

"No. All that she needs is rest."

"She left the station yesterday without a word."

"Yes," replied the non-committal Miss Van Arsdale.

"I came over to tell her that there isn't a thing to be had going west. Not even an upper. There was an east-bound in this morning. But the schedule isn't even a skeleton yet."

"Probably she won't be going for several days yet," said Miss Van Arsdale, and was by no means reassured by the unconscious brightness which illumined Banneker's face. "When she goes it will be east. She's changed her plans."

"Give me as much notice as you can and I'll do my best for her."

The other nodded. "Did you get any newspapers by the train?" she inquired.

"Yes; there was a mail in. I had a letter, too," he added after a little hesitation, due to the fact that he had intended telling Miss Welland about that letter first. Thus do confidences, once begun, inspire even the self-contained to further confidences.

"You know there was a reporter up from Angelica City writing up the wreck."

"Yes."

"Gardner, his name is. A nice sort of fellow. I showed him some nonsense that I wrote about the wreck."

"You? What kind of nonsense?"

"Oh, just how it struck me, and the queer things people said and did. He took it with him. Said it might give him some ideas."

"One might suppose it would. Did it?"

"Why, he didn't use it. Not that way. He sent it to the New York Sphere for what he calls a 'Sunday special,' and what do you think! They accepted it. He had a wire."

"As Gardner's?"

"Oh, no. As the impressions of an eye-witness. What's more, they'll pay for it and he's to send me the check."

"Then, in spite of a casual way of handling other people's ideas, Mr. Gardner apparently means to be honest."

"It's more than square of him. I gave him the stuff to use as he wanted to. He could just as well have collected for it. Probably he touched it up, anyway."

"The Goths and Vandals usually did 'touch up' whatever they acquired, I believe. Hasn't he sent you a copy?"

"He's going to send it. Or bring it."

"Bring it? What should attract him to Manzanita again?"

"Something mysterious. He says that there's a big sensational story following on the wreck that he's got a clue to; a tip, he calls it."

"That's strange. Where did this tip come from? Did he say?"

Miss Van Arsdale frowned.

"New York, I think. He spoke of its being a special job for The Sphere."

"Are you going to help him?"

"If I can. He's been white to me."

"But this isn't white, if it's what I suspect. It's yellow. One of their yellow sensations. The Sphere goes in for that sort of thing."

Miss Van Arsdale became silent and thoughtful.

"Of course, if it's something to do with the railroad I'd have to be careful. I can't give away the company's affairs."

"I don't think it is." Miss Van Arsdale's troubled eyes strayed toward the inner room.

Following them, Banneker's lighted up with a flash of astonished comprehension.

"You don't think —" he began.

His friend nodded assent.

"Why should the newspapers be after her?"

"She is associated with a set that is always in the limelight," explained Miss Van Arsdale, lowering her voice to a cautious pitch. "It makes its own limelight. Anything that they do is material for the papers."

"Yes; but what has she done?"

"Disappeared."

"Not at all. She sent back messages. So there can't be any mystery about it."

"But there might be what the howling headlines call 'romance.' In fact, there is, if they happen to have found out about it. And this looks very much as if they had. Ban, are you going to tell your reporter friend about Miss Welland?"

Banneker smiled gently, indulgently. "Do you think it likely?"

"No; I don't. But I want you to understand the importance of not betraying her in any way. Reporters are shrewd. And it might be quite serious for her to know that she was being followed and hounded now. She has had a shock."

"The bump on the head, you mean?"

"Worse than that. I think I'd better tell you since we are all in this thing together."

Briefly she outlined the abortive adventure that had brought Io west, and its ugly outcome.

"Publicity is the one thing we must protect her from," declared Miss Van Arsdale.

"Yes; that's clear enough."

"What shall you tell this Gardner man?"

"Nothing that he wants to know."

"You'll try to fool him?"

"I'm an awfully poor liar, Miss Camilla," replied the agent with his disarming smile. "I don't like the game and I'm no good at it. But I can everlastingly hold my tongue."

"Then he'll suspect something and go nosing about the village making inquiries."

"Let him. Who can tell him anything? Who's even seen her except you and me?"

"True enough. Nobody is going to see her for some days yet if I can help it. Not even you, Ban."

"Is she as bad as that?" he asked anxiously.

"She won't be any the better for seeing people," replied Miss Van Arsdale firmly, and with that the caller was forced to be content as he went back to his own place.

The morning train of the nineteenth, which should have been the noon train of the eighteenth, deposited upon the platform Gardner of the Angelica City Herald, and a suitcase. The thin and bespectacled reporter shook hands with Banneker.

"Well, Mr. Man," he observed. "You've made a hit with that story of yours even before it's got into print."

"Did you bring me a copy of the paper?"

Gardner grinned. "You seem to think Sunday specials are set up and printed overnight. Wait a couple of weeks."

"But they're going to publish it?"

"Surest thing you know. They've wired me to know who you are and what and why."

"Why what?"

"Oh, I dunno. Why a fellow who can do that sort of thing hasn't done it before or doesn't do it some more, I suppose. If you should ever want a job in the newspaper game, that story would be pretty much enough to get it for you."

"I wouldn't mind getting a little local correspondence to do," announced Banneker modestly.

"So you intimated before. Well, I can give you some practice right now. I'm on a blind trail that goes up in the air somewhere around here. Do you remember, we compared lists on the wreck?"

"Yes."

"Have you got any addition to your list since?"

"No," replied Banneker. "Have you?" he added.

"Not by name. But the tip is that there was a prominent New York society girl, one of the Four Hundred lot, on the train, and that she's vanished."

"All the bodies were accounted for," said the agent.

"They don't think she's dead. They think she's run away."

"Run away?" repeated Banneker with an impassive face.

"Whether the man was with her on the train or whether she was to join him on the coast isn't known. That's the worst of these society tips," pursued the reporter discontentedly. "They're always vague, and usually wrong. This one isn't even certain about who the girl is. But they think it's Stella Wrightington," he concluded in the manner of one who has imparted portentous tidings.

"Who's she?" said Banneker.

"Good Lord! Don't you ever read the news?" cried the disgusted journalist. "Why, she's had her picture published more times than a movie queen. She's the youngest daughter of Cyrus Wrightington, the multi-millionaire philanthropist. Now did you see anything of that kind on the train?"

"What does she look like?" asked the cautious Banneker.

"She looks like a million dollars!" declared the other with enthusiasm. "She's a killer! She's tall and blonde and a great athlete: baby-blue eyes and general rosebud effect."

"Nothing of that sort on the train, so far as I saw," said the agent.

"Did you see any couple that looked lovey-dovey?"

"No."

"Then, there's another tip that connects her up with Carter Holmesley. Know about him?"

"I've seen his name."

"He's been on a hell of a high-class drunk, all up and down the coast, for the last week or so. Spilled some funny talk at a dinner, that got into print. But he put up such a heavy bluff of libel, afterward, that the papers shied off. Just the same, I

believe they had it right, and that there was to have been a wedding-party on. Find the girl: that's the stunt now."

"I don't think you're likely to find her around here."

"Maybe not. But there's something. Holmesley has beaten it for the Far East. Sailed yesterday. But the story is still in this country, if the lady can be rounded up.... Well, I'm going to the village to make inquiries. Want to put me up again for the night if there's no train back?"

"Sure thing! There isn't likely to be, either."

Banneker felt greatly relieved at the easy turn given to the inquiry by the distorted tip. True, Gardner might, on his return, enter upon some more embarrassing line of inquiry; in which case the agent decided to take refuge in silence. But the reporter, when he came back late in the evening disheartened and disgusted with the fallibility of long-distance tips, declared himself sick of the whole business.

"Let's talk about something else," he said, having lighted his pipe. "What else have you written besides the wreck stuff?"

"Nothing," said Banneker.

"Come off! That thing was never a first attempt."

"Well, nothing except random things for my own amusement."

"Pass 'em over."

Banneker shook his head. "No; I've never shown them to anybody."

"Oh, all right. If you're shy about it," responded the reporter good-humoredly. "But you must have thought of writing as a profession."

"Vaguely, some day."

"You don't talk much like a country station-agent. And you don't act like one. And, judging from this room" — he looked about at the well-filled book-shelves — "you don't look like one. Quite a library. Harvey Wheelwright! Lord! I might have known. Great stuff, isn't it?"

"Do you think so?"

"Do I think so! I think it's the damndest spew that ever got into print. But it sells; millions. It's the piety touch does it.

The worst of it is that Wheelwright is a thoroughly decent chap and not onto himself a bit. Thinks he's a grand little booster for righteousness, sweetness and light, and all that. I had to interview him once. Oh, if I could just have written about him and his stuff as it really is!"

"Why didn't you?"

"Why, he's a popular literary hero out our way, and the biggest advertised author in the game. I'd look fine to the business office, knocking their fat graft, wouldn't I!"

"I don't believe I understand."

"No; you wouldn't. Never mind. You will if you ever get into the game. Hello! This is something different again. 'The Undying Voices.' Do you go in for poetry?"

"I like to read it once in a while."

"Good man!" Gardner took down the book, which opened in his hand. He glanced into it, then turned an inquiring and faintly quizzical look upon Banneker. "So Rossetti is one of the voices that sings to you. He sang to me when I was younger and more romantic. Heavens! he can sing, can't he! And you've picked one of his finest for your floral decoration." He intoned slowly and effectively:

> "Ah, who shall dare to search in what sad maze
> Thenceforth their incommunicable ways
> Follow the desultory feet of Death?"

Banneker took the book from him. Upon the sonnet a crushed bloom of the sage had left its spiced and fragrant stain. How came it there? Through but one possible agency of which Banneker could think. Io Welland!

After the reporter had left him, Banneker bore the volume to his room and read the sonnet again and again, devout and absorbed, a seeker for the oracle.

## Chapter X

"Wouldn't you like to know when I'm going home?"

Io Welland looked up from beneath her dark lashes at her hostess with a mixture of mischief and deprecation.

"No," said Miss Van Arsdale quietly.

"Ah? Well, I would. Here it is two full weeks since I settled down on you. Why don't you evict me?"

Miss Van Arsdale smiled. The girl continued:

"Why don't I evict myself? I'm quite well and sane again — at least I think so — thanks to you. Very well, then, Io; why don't you go home?"

"Instinct of self-preservation," suggested the other. "You're better off here until your strength is quite restored, aren't you?"

The girl propped her chin in her hand and turned upon her companion a speculative regard. "Camilla Van Arsdale, you don't really like me," she asserted.

"Liking is such an undefined attitude," replied the other, unembarrassed.

"You find me diverting," defined Io. "But you resent me, don't you?"

"That's rather acute in you. I don't like your standards nor those of your set."

"I've abandoned them."

"You'll resume them as soon as you get back."

"Shall I ever get back?" The girl moved to the door. Her figure swayed forward yieldingly as if she would give herself into the keeping of the sun-drenched, pine-soaked air. "Enchantment!" she murmured.

"It is a healing place," said the habitant of it, low, as if to herself.

A sudden and beautiful pity softened and sobered Io's face. "Miss Van Arsdale," said she with quiet sincerity; "if there should ever come a time when I can do you a service in word or deed, I would come from the other side of the world to do it."

"That is a kindly, but rather exaggerated gratitude."

"It isn't gratitude. It's loyalty. Whatever you have done, I believe you were right. And, right or wrong, I — I am on your side. But I wonder why you have been so good to me. Was it a sort of class feeling?"

"Sex feeling would be nearer it," replied the other. "There is something instinctive which makes women who are alone stand by each other."

Io nodded. "I suppose so. Though I've never felt it, or the need of it before this. Well, I had to speak before I left, and I suppose I must go on soon."

"I shall miss you," said the hostess, and added, smiling, "as one misses a stimulant. Stay through the rest of the month, anyway."

"I'd like to," answered Io gratefully. "I've written Delavan that I'm coming back — and now I'm quite dreading it. Do you suppose there ever yet was a woman with understanding of herself?"

"Not unless she was a very dull and stupid woman with little to understand," smiled Miss Van Arsdale. "What are you doing to-day?"

"Riding down to lunch with your paragon of a station-agent."

Miss Van Arsdale shook her head dubiously. "I'm afraid he'll miss his daily stimulant after you've gone. It has been daily, hasn't it?"

"I suppose it has, just about," admitted the girl. "The stimulus hasn't been all on one side, I assure you. What a mind to be buried here in the desert! And what an annoying spirit of contentment! It's that that puzzles me. Sometimes it enrages me."

"Are you going to spoil what you cannot replace?" The retort was swift, almost fierce.

"Surely, you won't blame me if he looks beyond this horizon," protested Io. "Life is sure to reach out in one form or another and seize on him. I told him so."

"Yes," breathed the other. "You would."

"What were you intending to do with him?"

There was a hint of challenge in the slight emphasis given to the query.

"I? Nothing. He is under no obligation to me."

"There you and he differ. He regards you as an infallible mentor." A twinkle of malice crept into the slumbrous eyes. "Why do you let him wear made-up bow ties?" demanded Io.

"What does it matter?"

"Out here, nothing. But elsewhere — well, it does define a man, doesn't it?"

"Undoubtedly. I've never gone into it with him."

"I wonder if I could guess why."

"Very likely. You seem preternaturally acute in these matters."

"Is it because the Sears-Roebuck mail-order double-bow knot in polka-dot pattern stands as a sign of pristine innocence?"

In spite of herself Miss Van Arsdale laughed. "Something of that sort."

Io's soft lips straightened. "It's rotten bad form. Why shouldn't he be right? It's so easy. Just a hint —"

"From you?"

"From either of us. Yes; from me, if you like."

"It's quite an intimate interest, isn't it?"

"'But never can battle of men compare
With merciless feminine fray'"—

quoted Io pensively.

"Kipling is a sophomore about women," retorted Miss Van Arsdale. "We're not going to quarrel over Errol Banneker. The odds are too unfair."

"Unfair?" queried Io, with a delicate lift of brow.

"Don't misunderstand me. I know that whatever you do will be within the rules of the game. That's the touchstone of honor of your kind."

"Isn't it good enough? It ought to be, for it's about the only one most of us have." Io laughed. "We're becoming very serious. May I take the pony?"

"Yes. Will you be back for supper?"

"Of course. Shall I bring the paragon?"

"If you wish."

Outside the gaunt box of the station, Io, from the saddle sent forth her resonant, young call:

"Oh, Ban!"

> "'Tis the voice of the Butterfly; hear her declare,
> 'I've come down to the earth; I am tired of the air'"

chanted Banneker's voice in cheerful paraphrase. "Light and preen your wings, Butterfly."

Their tone was that of comrades without a shade of anything deeper.

"Busy?" asked Io.

"Just now. Give me another five minutes."

"I'll go to the hammock."

One lone alamo tree, an earnest of spring water amongst the dry-sand growth of the cactus, flaunted its bright verdency a few rods back of the station, and in its shade Banneker had swung a hammock for Io. Hitching her pony and unfastening her hat, the girl stretched herself luxuriously in the folds. A slow wind, spice-laden with the faint, crisp fragrancies of the desert, swung her to a sweet rhythm. She closed her eyes happily . . . and when she opened them, Banneker was standing over her, smiling.

"Don't speak to me," she murmured; "I want to believe that this will last forever."

Silent and acquiescent, he seated himself in a camp-chair close by. She stretched a hand to him, closing her eyes again.

"Swing me," she ordered.

He aided the wind to give a wider sweep to the hammock. Io stirred restlessly.

"You've broken the spell," she accused softly. "Weave me another one."

"What shall it be?" He bent over the armful of books which he had brought out.

"You choose this time."

"I wonder," he mused, regarding her consideringly.

"Ah, you may well wonder! I'm in a very special mood to-day."

"When aren't you, Butterfly?" he laughed.

"Beware that you don't spoil it. Choose well, or forever after hold your peace."

He lifted the well-worn and well-loved volume of poetry. It parted in his hand to the Rossetti sonnet. He began to read at the lines:

> "When Work and Will awake too late, to gaze
> After their life sailed by, and hold their breath."

Io opened her eyes again.

"Why did you select that thing?'

"Why did you mark it?"

"Did I mark it?"

"Certainly, I'm not responsible for the sage-blossom between the pages."

"Ah, the sage! That's for wisdom," she paraphrased lightly.

"Do you think Rossetti so wise a preceptor?"

"It isn't often that he preaches. When he does, as in that sonnet — well, the inspiration may be a little heavy, but he does have something to say."

"Then it's the more evident that you marked it for some special reason."

"What supernatural insight," she mocked. "Can you read your name between the lines?"

"What is it that you want me to do?"

"You mean to ask what it is that Mr. Rossetti wants you to do. I didn't write the sonnet, you know."

"You didn't fashion the arrow, but you aimed it."

"Am I a good marksman?"

"I suppose you mean that I'm wasting my time here."

"Surely not!" she gibed. "Forming a link of transcontinental traffic. Helping to put a girdle 'round the earth in eighty days — or is it forty now? — enlightening the traveling public about the three-twenty-four train; dispensing time-tables and other precious mediums of education —"

"I'm happy here," he said doggedly.

"Are you going to be, always?"

His face darkened with doubt. "Why shouldn't I be?" he argued. "I've got everything I need. Some day I thought I might write."

"What about?" The question came sharp and quick.

He looked vaguely around the horizon.

"Oh, no, Ban!" she said. "Not this. You've got to know something besides cactuses and owls to write, these days. You've got to know men. And women," she added, in a curious tone, with a suspicion of effort, even of jealousy in it.

"I've never cared much for people," he said.

"It's an acquired taste, I suppose for some of us. There's something else." She came slowly to a sitting posture and fixed her questioning, baffling eyes on his. "Ban, don't you want to make a success in life?"

For a moment he did not answer. When he spoke, it was with apparent irrelevance to what she had said. "Once I went to a revival. A reformed tough was running it. About every three minutes he'd thrust out his hands and grab at the air and say, 'Oh, brothers; don't you yearn for Jesus?'"

"What has that to do with it?" questioned Io, surprised and impatient.

"Only that, somehow, the way you said 'success in life' made me think of him and his 'yearn for Jesus.'"

"Errol Banneker," said Io, amused in spite of her annoyance, "you are possessed of a familiar devil who betrays other people's inner thoughts to you. Success *is* a species of religion to me, I suppose."

"And you are making converts, like all true enthusiasts. Tell, tell me. What kind of success?"

"Oh, power. Money. Position. Being somebody."

"I'm somebody here all right. I'm the station-agent of the Atkinson & St. Philip Railroad Company."

"Now you're trying to provoke me."

"No. But to get success you've got to want it, haven't you?" he asked more earnestly. "To want it with all your strength."

"Of course. Every man ought to."

"I'm not so sure," he objected. "There's a kind of virtue in staying put, isn't there?"

She made a little gesture of impatience.

"I'll give you a return for your sonnet," he pursued, and repeated from memory:

> "What else is Wisdom? What of man's endeavor
> Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
> To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
> To hold a hand uplifted over Hate.
> And shall not Loveliness be loved forever?"

"I don't know it. It's beautiful. What is it?"

"Gilbert Murray's translation of 'The Bacchæ.' My legal mentors had a lapse of dry-as-dustness and sent it to me."

"'To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait,'" murmured the girl. "That is what I've been doing here. How good it is! But not for you," she added, her tone changing from dreamy to practical. "Ban, I suspect there's too much poetry in your cosmos."

"Very probably. Poetry isn't success, is it?"

Her face grew eager. "It might be. The very highest. But you've got to make yourself known and felt among people."

"Do you think I could? And how does one get that kind of desire?" he asked lazily.

"How? I've known men to do it for love; and I've known them to do it for hate; and I've known them to do it for money. Yes; and there's another cause."

"What is it?"

"Restlessness."

"That's ambition with its nerves gone bad, isn't it?"

Again she smiled. "You'll know what it is some day."

"Is it contagious?" he asked solicitously.

"Don't be alarmed. I haven't it. Not now. I'd love to stay on and on and just 'breathe and wait,' if the gods were good."

"'Dream that the gods are good,'" he echoed. "The last thing they ever think of being according to my reading."

She capped his line;

> "We twain, once well in sunder,
> What will the mad gods do —'"

she began; then broke off, jumping to her feet. "I'm talking sheer nonsense!" she cried. "Take me for a walk in the woods. The desert glares to-day."

"I'll have to be back by twelve," he said. "Excuse me just a moment."

He disappeared into the portable house. When he rejoined her, she asked:

"What did you go in there for? To get your revolver?"

"Yes."

"I've carried one since the day you told me to. Not that I've met a soul that looked dangerous, nor that I'd know how to shoot or when, if I did."

"The sight of it would be taken as evidence that you knew how to use it," he assured her.

For a time, as they walked, she had many questions to put about the tree and bird life surrounding them. In the midst of it he asked her:

"Do you ever get restless?"

"I haven't, here. I'm getting rested."

"And at home I suppose you're too busy."

"Being busy is no preventive. Somebody has said that St. Vitus is the patron saint of New York society."

"It must take almost all the time those people have to keep up with the theaters and with the best in poetry and what's being done and thought, and the new books and all that," he surmised.

"I beg your pardon; what was that about poetry and books?"

"Girls like you — society girls, I mean — read everything there is, don't they?"

"Where do you get that extraordinary idea?"

"Why, from knowing you."

"My poor, innocent Ban! If you were to try and talk books and poetry, 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses,' to the average society girl, as you call her, what do you suppose would happen?"

"Why, I suppose I'd give myself away as an ignoramus."

"Heaven save you for a woolly lambkin! The girl would flee, shrieking, and issue a warning against you as a highbrow, a prig,

and a hopeless bore. They don't read books, except a few chocolate-cream novels. They haven't the time."

"But you —"

"Oh, I'm a freak! I get away with it because I'm passably good-looking and know how to dress, and do what I please by the divine right of — well, of just doing it. But, even so, a lot of the men are rather afraid of me in their hearts. They suspect the bluestocking. Let 'em suspect! The market is plenty good enough," declared Io flippantly.

"Then you just took up books as a sort of freak; a side issue?" The disappointment in his face was almost ludicrous.

"No." A quiet gravity altered her expression. "I'll tell you about me, if you want to hear. My mother was the daughter of a famous classical scholar, who was opposed to her marriage because Father has always been a man of affairs. From the first, Mother brought me up to love books and music and pictures. She died when I was twelve, and poor Father, who worshiped her, wanted to carry out her plans for me, though he had no special sympathy with them. To make things worse for him, nobody but Mother ever had any control over me; I was spoiled and self-willed and precocious, and I thought the world owed me a good time. Dad's business judgment of human nature saved the situation, he thoroughly understood one thing about me, that I'd keep a bargain if I made it. So we fixed up our little contract; I was to go through college and do my best, and after I graduated, I was to have a free hand and an income of my own, a nice one. I did the college trick. I did it well. I was third in my class, and there wasn't a thing in literature or languages that they could stop me from getting. At eighteen they turned me loose on the world, and here I am, tired of it, but still loving it. That's all of me. Aren't I a good little autobiographer. Every lady her own Boswell! What are you listening to?"

"There's a horse coming along the old trail," said Banneker.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Some one following us?"

He shook his head. A moment later the figure of a mounted man loomed through the brush. He was young, strong-built, and not ill-looking. "Howdy, Ban," he said.

Banneker returned the greeting.

"Whee-ew!" shrilled the other, wiping his brow. "This sure does fetch the licker outen a man's hide. Hell of a wet night at the Sick Coyote last night. Why wasn't you over?"

"Busy," replied Banneker.

Something in his tone made the other raise himself from his weary droop. He sighted Io.

"Howdy, ma'am," he said. "Didn't see there was ladies present."

"Good-morning," said Io.

"Visitin' hereabouts?" inquired the man, eyeing her curiously.

"Yes."

"Where, if I might be bold to ask?"

"If you've got any questions to ask, ask them of me, Fred," directed Banneker.

While there was nothing truculent in his manner, it left no doubt as to his readiness and determination.

Fred looked both sullen and crestfallen.

"It ain't nothin'," he said. "Only, inquiries was bein' made by a gent from a Angelica City noospaper last week."

"Somebody else meant," asserted Banneker. "You keep that in mind, will you? And it isn't necessary that you should mention this lady at all. Savvy, Fred?"

The other grunted, touched his sombrero to Io and rode on.

"Has a reporter been here inquiring after me?" asked Io.

"Not after you. It was some one else."

"If the newspapers tracked me here, I'd have to leave at once."

"They won't. At least, it isn't likely."

"You'd get me out some way, wouldn't you, Ban?" she said trustfully.

"Yes."

"Ban; that Fred person seemed afraid of you."

"He's got nothing to be afraid of unless he talks too much."

"But you had him 'bluffed.' I'm sure you had. Ban, did you ever kill a man?"

"No."

"Or shoot one?"

"Not even that."

"Yet, I believe, from the way he looked at you, that you've got a reputation as a 'bad man'?"

"So I have. But it's no fault of mine."

"How did you get it?"

"You'll laugh if I tell you. They say I've got a 'killer's' eye."

The girl examined his face with grave consideration. "You've got nice eyes," was her verdict. "That deep brown is almost wasted on a man; some girl ought to have it. I used to hear a — a person, who made a deep impression on me at the time, insist that there was always a flaw in the character of a person with large, soft brown eyes."

"Isn't there a flaw in every character?"

"Human nature being imperfect, there must be. What is yours; suppressed murderousness?"

"Not at all. My reputation is unearned, though useful. Just before I came here, a young chap showed up from nowhere and loafed around Manzanita. He was a pretty kind of lad, and one night in the Sick Coyote some of the old-timers tried to put something over on him. When the smoke cleared away, there was one dead and six others shot up, and Little Brownie was out on the desert, riding for the next place, awfully sore over a hole in his new sombrero. He was a two-gun man from down near the border. Well, when I arrived in town, I couldn't understand why every one looked so queerly at my eyes, until Mindle, the mail-driver, told me they were exactly like the hair-trigger boy's. Cheap and easy way to get a reputation, isn't it?"

"But you must have something back of it," insisted the girl. "Are you a good shot?"

"Nothing fancy; there are twenty better in town."

"Yet you pin some faith to your 'gun,'" she pointed out.

He glanced over his shoulder to right and left. Io jumped forward with a startled cry. So swift and secret had been his motion that she hardly saw the weapon before — PLACK — PLACK — PLACK — the three shots had sounded. The smoke drifted around him in a little circle, for the first two shots had been over

his shoulder and the third as he whirled. Walking back, he carefully examined the trunks of three trees.

"I'd have only barked that fellow, if he'd been a man," he observed, shaking his head at the second mark.

"You frightened me," complained Io.

"I'm sorry. I thought you wanted to see a little gun-play. Out here it isn't how straight you can shoot at a bull's-eye, but how quick you can plant your bullets, and usually in a mark that isn't obliging enough to be dead in line. So I practice occasionally, just in case."

"Very interesting. But I've got luncheon to cook," said Io.

They returned through the desert. As he opened the door of the shack for her, Banneker, reverting to her autobiographical sketch, remarked thoughtfully and without preliminary:

"I might have known there couldn't be any one else like you."

## Chapter XI

Although the vehicle of his professional activities had for some years been a small and stertorous automobile locally known as "Puffy Pete," Mr. James Mindle always referred to his process of postal transfer from the station to the town as "teamin' over the mail." He was a frail, grinny man from the prairie country, much given to romantic imaginings and an inordinate admiration for Banneker.

Having watched from the seat of his chariot the brief but ceremonial entry of Number Three, which, on regular schedule, roared through Manzanita at top speed, he descended, captured the mail-bag and, as the transcontinental pulled out, accosted the station-agent.

"What'd she stop for, Ban?"

"Special orders."

"Didn't say nothin' about havin' a ravin' may-ni-ac aboard, did theh?"

"No."

"Ban, was you ever in the State of Ohio?"

"A long time ago."

"Are Ohio folks liable to be loony?"

"Not more than others, I reckon, Jimmy."

"Pretty enthoosiastic about themselves, though, ain't theh?"

"Why, I don't know. It's a nice country there, Jimmy."

"There was one on Number Three sure thought so. Hadn't scarcely come to a stop when off he jumps and waves his fins and gives three cheers for it."

"For what?"

"Ohio. I'm tellin' you. He ramps across the track yippin' 'Ohio! Ohio! Ohio!' whoopity-yoop. He come right at me and I says, 'Watch yehself, Buddy. You'll git left.'"

"What did he say to that?" asked Banneker indulgently.

"Never looked at me no more than a doodle-bug. Just yelled 'Ohio!' again. So I come back at him with 'Missourah.' He

grabs me by the shoulder and points to your shack. 'Who owns that little shed?' says he, very excited. 'My friend, Mr. Banneker,' says I, polite as always to strangers. 'But I own that shoulder you're leanin' on, and I'm about to take it away with me when I go,' I says. He leaned off and says, 'Where did that young lady come from that was standin' in the doorway a minute ago?' 'Young lady,' Ban. Do you get that? So I says, 'You're lucky, Bud. When I get 'em, it's usually snakes and bugs and such-like rep-tyles. Besides,' I says, 'your train is about to forgit that you got off it,' I says. With that he gives another screech that don't even mean as much as Ohio and tails onto the back platform just in time."

Said Ban, after frowning consideration:

"You didn't see any lady around the shack, did you, Jimmy?"

"Not on your life," replied the little man indignantly. "I ain't had anything like that since I took the mail-teamin' contract."

"How good time do you think Puffy Pete could make across-desert in case I should want it?" inquired the agent after a pause.

The mail-man contemplated his "team," bubbling and panting a vaporous breath over the platform. "Pete ain't none too fond of sand," he confessed. "But if you want to *git* anywhere, him and me'll git you there. You know that, Ban."

Banneker nodded comradely and the post chugged away.

Inside the shack Io had set out the luncheon-things. To Banneker's eyes she appeared quite unruffled, despite the encounter which he had surmised from Jimmy's sketch.

"Get me some flowers for the table, Ban," she directed. "I want it to look festive."

"Why, in particular?"

"Because I'm afraid we won't have many more luncheons together."

He made no comment, but went out and returned with the flowers. Meantime Io had made up her mind.

"I've had an unpleasant surprise, Ban."

"I was afraid so."

She glanced up quickly. "Did you see him?"

"No. Mindle, the mail transfer man, did."

"Oh! Well, that was Aleck Babson. 'Babbling Babson," he's called at the clubs. He's the most inveterate gossip in New York."

"It's a long way from New York," pointed out Banneker.

"Yes; but he has a long tongue. Besides, he'll see the Westerleys and my other friends in Paradiso, and babble to them."

"Suppose he does?"

"I won't have people chasing here after me or pestering me with letters," she said passionately. "Yet I don't want to go away. I want to get more rested, Ban, and forget a lot of things."

He nodded. Comfort and comprehension were in his silence.

"You can be as companionable as a dog," said Io softly. "Where did you get your tact, I wonder? Well, I shan't go till I must....Lemonade, Ban! I brought over the lemons myself."

They lunched a little soberly and thoughtfully.

"And I wanted it to be festive to-day," said Io wistfully, speaking out her thoughts as usual. "Ban, does Miss Camilla smoke?"

" I don't know. Why?"

"Because if she does, you'll think it all right. And I want a cigarette now."

"If you do, I'll *know* it's all right, Butterfly," returned her companion fetching a box from a shelf.

"Hold the thought!" cried Io gayly. "There's a creed for you! 'Whatever is, is right,' provided that it's Io who does it. Always judge me by that standard, Ban, won't you?...Where in the name of Sir Walter Raleigh's ghost did you get these cigarettes? 'Mellorosa'... Ban, is this a Sears-Roebuck stock?"

"No. It came from town. Don't you like it?"

'It's quite curious and interesting. Never mind, my dear; I won't tease you."

For all that Io's "my dear" was the most casual utterance imaginable, it brought a quick flush to Banneker's face. Chattering carelessly, she washed up the few dishes, put them away in the brackets, and then, smoking another of the despised Mellorosas, wandered to the book-shelves.

"Read me something out of your favorite book, Ban....No; this one."

She handed him the thick mail-order catalogue. With a gravity equal to her own he took it

"What will you have?"

"Let the spirit of Sears-Roebuck decide. Open at random and expound."

He thrust a finger between the leaves and began:

'Our Special, Fortified Black Fiber Trunk for Hard Travel. Made of Three-Ply Ven —"

"Oh, to have my trunks again!" sighed the girl. "Turn to something else. I don't like that. It reminds me of travel."

Obedient, Banneker made another essay:

"Clay County Clay Target Traps. Easily Adjusted to the Elevation —"

"Oh, dear!" she broke in again. "That reminds me that Dad wrote me to look up his pet shot-gun before his return. I don't like that either. Try again."

This time the explorer plunged deep into the volume.

"How to Make Home Home-like. An Invaluable Counselor for the Woman of the Household —"

Io snatched the book from the reader's hand and tossed it into a corner. "Sears-Roebuck are very tactless," she declared. "Everything they have to offer reminds one of home. What do you think of home, Ban? Home, as an abstract proposition. Home as the what-d'you-call-'em of the nation; the palladium — no, the bulwark? Home as viewed by the homing pigeon? Home, Sweet Home, as sung by — Would you answer, Ban, if I stopped gibbering and gave you the chance?"

"I've never had much opportunity to judge about home, you know."

She darted out a quick little hand and touched his sleeve. The raillery had faded from her face. "So you haven't. Not very tactful of me, was it! Will you throw me into the corner with Mr. Sears and Mr. Roebuck, Ban? I'm sorry."

"You needn't be. One gets used to being an air-plant without roots."

"Yet you wouldn't have fitted out this shack," she pointed out shrewdly, "unless you had the instincts of home."

"That's true enough. Fortunately it's the kind of home I can take along when they transfer me."

Io went to the door and looked afar on the radiant splendor of the desert, and, nearer, into the cool peace of the forest.

"But you can't take all this," she reminded him.

"No. I can't take this."

"Shall you miss it?"

A shadow fell upon his face. "I'd miss something — I don't know what it is — that no other place has ever given me. Why do you talk as if I were going away from it? I'm not."

"Oh, yes; you are," she laughed softly. "It is so written. I'm a seeress." She turned from the door and threw herself into a chair.

"What will take me?"

"Something inside you. Something unawakened. 'Something lost beyond the ranges.' You'll know, and you'll obey it."

"Shall I ever come back, O seeress?"

At the question her eyes grew dreamy and distant. Her voice when she spoke sank to a low-pitched monotone.

"Yes, you'll come back. Sometime.... So shall I...not for years...but —" She jumped to her feet. "What kind of rubbish am I talking?" she cried with forced merriment. "Is your tobacco drugged with hasheesh, Ban?"

He shook his head. "It's the pull of the desert," he murmured. "It's caught you sooner than most. You're more responsive, I suppose; more sens — Why, Butterfly! You're shaking."

"A Scotchman would say that I was 'fey.' Ban, do you think it means that I'm coming back here to die?" She laughed again. "If I were fated to die here, I expect that I missed my good chance in the smash-up. Fortunately I'm not superstitious."

"There might be worse places," said he slowly. "It is the place that would call me back if ever I got down and out." He pointed through the window to the distant, glowing purity of the mountain peak. "One could tell one's troubles to that tranquil old god."

"Would he listen to mine, I wonder?"

"Try him before you go. You can leave them all here and I'll watch over them for you to see that they don't get loose and bother you."

"Absolution! If it were only as easy as that! This *is* a haunted place.... Why should I be here at all? Why didn't I go when I should? Why a thousand things?"

"Chance."

"Is there any such thing? Why can't I sleep at night yet, as I ought? Why do I still feel hunted? What's happening to me, Ban? What's getting ready to happen?"

"Nothing. That's nerves."

"Yes; I'll try not to think of it. But at night — Ban, suppose I should come over in the middle of the night when I can't sleep, and call outside your window?"

"I'd come down, of course. But you'd have to be careful about rattlers," answered the practical Ban.

"Your friend, Camilla, would intercept me, anyway. I don't think she sleeps too well, herself. Do you know what she's doing out here?"

"She came for her health."

"That isn't what I asked you, my dear. Do you know what she's doing?"

"No. She never told me."

"Shall I tell you?"

"No."

"It's interesting. Aren't you curious?"

"If she wanted me to know, she'd tell me."

"Indubitably correct, and quite praiseworthy," mocked the girl. "Never mind; you know how to be staunch to your friends."

"In this country a man who doesn't is reckoned a yellow dog."

"He is in any decent country. So take that with you when you go."

"I'm not going," he asserted with an obstinate set to his jaw.

"Wait and see," she taunted. "So you won't let me send you books?" she questioned after a pause.

"No."

"No, I thank you," she prompted.

"No, I thank you," he amended. "I'm an uncouth sort of person, but I meant the 'thank you.'"

"Of course you did. And uncouthness is the last thing in the world you could be accused of. That's the wonder of it.... No; I don't suppose it really is. It's birth."

"If it's anything, it's training. My father was a stickler for forms, in spite of being a sort of hobo."

"Well, forms make the game, very largely. You won't find them essentially different when you go out into the — I forgot again. That kind of prophecy annoys you, doesn't it? There is one book I'm going to send you, though, which you can't refuse. Nobody can refuse it. It isn't done."

"What is that?"

Her answer surprised him. "The Bible."

"Are you religious? Of course, a butterfly should be, shouldn't she? should believe in the release of the soul from its chrysalis — the butterfly's immortality. Yet I wouldn't have suspected you of a leaning in that direction."

"Oh, religion!" Her tone set aside the subject as insusceptible of sufficient or satisfactory answer. "I go through the forms," she added, a little disdainfully. "As to what I believe and do — which is what one's own religion is — why, I assume that if the game is worth playing at all, there must be a Judge and Maker of the Rules. As far as I understand them, I follow them."

"You have a sort of religious feeling for success, though, haven't you?" he reminded her slyly.

"Not at all. Just human, common sense."

"But your creed as you've just given it, the rules of the game and that; that's precisely the Bible formula, I believe."

"How do you know?" she caught him up. "You haven't a Bible in the place, so far as I've noticed."

"No; I haven't."

"You should have."

"Probably. But I can't, somehow, adjust myself to that advice as coming from you."

"Because you don't understand what I'm getting at. It isn't religious advice."

"Then what is it?"

"Literary, purely. You're going to write, some day. Oh, don't look doubtful! That's foreordained. It doesn't take a seeress to prophesy that. And the Bible is the one book that a writer ought to read every day. Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs. Pretty much all the Old Testament, and a lot of the New. It has grown into our intellectual life until its phrases and catchwords are full of overtones and sub-meanings. You've got to have it in your business; your coming business, I mean. I know what I'm talking about, Mr. Errol Banneker — *moi qui parle*. They offered me an instructorship in Literature when I graduated. I even threatened to take it, just for a joke on Dad. *Now*, will you be good and accept my fully explained and diagrammed Bible without fearing that I have designs on your soul?"

"Yes."

"And will you please go back to your work at once, and by and by take me home and stay to supper? Miss Van Arsdale told me to ask you."

"All right. I'll be glad to. What will you do between now and four o'clock?"

"Prowl in your library and unearth more of your secrets."

"You're welcome if you can find any. I don't deal in 'em."

When Banneker, released from his duties until evening train time, rejoined her, and they were riding along the forest trail, he said:

"You've started me to theorizing about myself."

"Do it aloud," she invited.

"Well; all my boyhood I led a wandering life, as you know. We were never anywhere as much as a month at a time. In a way, I liked the change and adventure. In another way, I got dead sick of it. Don't you suppose that my readiness to settle down and vegetate is the reaction from that?"

"It sounds reasonable enough. You might put it more simply by saying that you were tired. But by now you ought to be rested."

"Therefore I ought to be stirring myself so as to get tired again?"

"If you don't stir, you'll rust."

"Rust is a painless death for useless mechanism."

She shot an impatient side-glance at him. "Either you're a hundred years old," she said, "or that's sheer pose."

"Perhaps it is a sort of pose. If so, it's a self-protective one."

"Suppose I asked you to come to New York?"

Intrepid though she was, her soul quaked a little at her own words, foreseeing those mail-order-cut clothes and the resolute butterflyness of the tie greeting her on Fifth Avenue.

"What to do?"

"Sell tickets at the Grand Central Station, of course!" she shot back at him. "Ban, you *are* aggravating! 'What to do?' Father would find you some sort of place while you were fitting in."

'No. I wouldn't take a job from you any more than I'd take anything else."

"You carry principles to the length of absurdity. Come and get your own job, then. You're not timid, are you?"

"Not particularly. I'm just contented."

At that provocation her femininity flared. "Ban," she cried with exasperation and appeal enchantingly mingled, "aren't you going to miss me at all when I go?"

"I've been trying not to think of that," he said slowly.

"Well, think of it," she breathed. "No!" she contradicted herself passionately. "Don't think of it. I shouldn't have said that.... I don't know what is the matter with me to-day, Ban. Perhaps I *am* fey." She smiled to him slantwise.

"It's the air," he answered judicially. "There's another storm brewing somewhere or I'm no guesser. More trouble for the schedule."

"That's right!" she cried eagerly. "*Be* the Atkinson & St. Philip station-agent again. Let's talk about trains. It's — it's so reliable."

"Far from it on this line," he answered, adopting her light tone. "Particularly if we have more rain. You may become a permanent resident yet."

Some rods short of the Van Arsdale cabin the trail took a sharp

turn amidst the brush. Halfway on the curve Io caught at Banneker's near rein.

"Hark!" she exclaimed.

The notes of a piano sounded faintly clear in the stillness. As the harmonies dissolved and merged, a voice rose above them, resonant and glorious, rose and sank and pleaded and laughed and loved, while the two young listeners leaned unconsciously toward each other in their saddles. Silence fell again. The very forest life itself seemed hushed in a listening trance.

"Heavens!" whispered Banneker. "Who is it?"

"Camilla Van Arsdale, of course. Didn't you know?"

"I knew she was musical. I didn't know she had a voice like that."

"Ten years ago New York was wild over it."

"But why —"

"Hush! She's beginning again."

Once more the sweep of the chords was followed by the superb voice while the two wayfarers and all the world around them waited, breathless and enchained. At the end, Banneker said dreamily:

"I've never heard anything like that before. It says everything that can't be said in words alone, doesn't it? It makes me think of something — What is it?" He groped for a moment, then repeated:

> "'A passionate ballad, gallant and gay,
> Singing afar in the springtime of life,
> Singing of youth and of love
> And of honor that cannot die.'"

Io drew a deep, tremulous breath. "Yes; it's like that. What a voice! And what an art to be buried out here! It's one of her own songs, I think. Probably an unpublished one."

"Her own? Does she write music?"

"She is Royce Melvin, the composer. Does that mean anything to you?"

He shook his head.

"Some day it will. They say that he — every one thinks it's a he — will take Massenet's place as a lyrical composer. I found her out by accidentally coming on the manuscript of a Melvin

song that I knew. That's her secret that I spoke of. Do you mind my having told you?"

"Why, no. It'll never go any further. I wonder why she never told me. And why she keeps so shut off from the world here."

"Ah; that's another secret, and one that I shan't tell you," returned Io gravely. "There's the piano again."

A few indeterminate chords came to their ears. There followed a jangling disharmony. They waited, but there was nothing more. They rode on.

At the lodge Banneker took the horses around while Io went in. Immediately her voice, with a note of alarm in it, summoned him. He found her bending over Miss Van Arsdale, who lay across the divan in the living-room with eyes closed, breathing jerkily. Her lips were blue and her hands looked shockingly lifeless.

"Carry her into her room," directed Io.

Banneker picked up the tall, strong-built form without effort and deposited it on the bed in the inner room.

"Open all the windows," commanded the girl. "See if you can find me some ammonia or camphor. Quick! She looks as if she were dying."

One after another Banneker tried the bottles on the dresser. "Here it is. Ammonia," he said.

In his eagerness he knocked a silver-mounted photograph to the floor. He thrust the drug into the girl's hand and watched her helplessly as she worked over the limp figure on the bed. Mechanically he picked up the fallen picture to replace it. There looked out at him the face of a man of early middle age, a face of manifest intellectual power, high-boned, long-lined, and of the austere, almost ascetic beauty which the Florentine coins have preserved for us in clear fidelity. Across the bottom was written in a peculiarly rhythmic script, the legend:

"Toujours à toi. W."

"She's coming back," said Io's voice. "No. Don't come nearer. You'll shut off the air. Find me a fan."

He ran to the outer room and came back with a palm-leaf.

"She wants something," said Io in an agonized half-voice. "She wants it so badly. What is it? Help me, Ban! She can't speak. Look at her eyes — so imploring. Is it medicine?... No! Ban, can't you help?"

Banneker took the silver-framed portrait and placed it in the flaccid hand. The fingers closed over it. The filmiest wraith of a smile played about the blue lips.

An hour later, Io came out to Banneker waiting fearfully in the big room.

"She won't have a doctor. I've given her the strychnia and she insists she'll be all right."

"Don't you think I ought to go for the doctor, anyway?"

"She wouldn't see him. She's very strong-willed.... That's a wonderful woman, Ban." Io's voice shook a little.

"Yes."

"How did you know about the picture?"

"I saw it on the dresser. And when I saw her eyes, I guessed."

"Yes; there's only one thing a woman wants like *that*, when she's dying. You're rather a wonderful person, yourself, to have known. That's her other secret, Ban. The one I said I couldn't tell you."

"I've forgotten it," replied Banneker gravely.

## Chapter XII

Attendance upon the sick-room occupied Io's time for several days thereafter. Morning and afternoon Banneker rode over from the station to make anxious inquiry. The self-appointed nurse reported progress as rapid as could be expected, but was constantly kept on the alert because of the patient's rebellion against enforced idleness. Seizures of the same sort she had suffered before, it appeared, but none hitherto so severe. Nothing could be done, she told Io, beyond the administration of the medicine, for which she had full directions. One day an attack would finish it all; meantime, in spite of her power of self-repression, she chafed at the monotony of her imprisonment.

In the late afternoon of the day after the collapse, while Io was heating water at the fireplace, she heard a drawer open in the sick-room and hurried back to find Miss Van Arsdale hanging to the dresser, her face gray-splotched and her fingers convulsively crushing a letter which she had taken from under lock. Alarmed and angry, the amateur nurse got her back to bed only half conscious, but still cherishing her trove. When, an hour later, she dared leave her charge, she heard the rustle of smoothed-out paper and remained outside long enough to allow for the reading. On her return there was no sign of the letter. Miss Van Arsdale, a faint and hopeful color in her cheeks, was asleep.

For Banneker these were days of trial and tribulation. Added to the anxiety that he felt for his best friend was the uncertainty as to what he ought to do about the developments affecting her guest. For he had heard once more from Gardner.

"It's on the cards," wrote the reporter, "that I may be up to see you again. I'm still working, on and off, on the tip that took me on that wild-goose chase. If I come again I won't quit without some of the wild goose's tail feathers, at least. There's a new tip locally; it leaked out from Paradiso. ["The Babbling Babson," interjected the reader mentally.] It looks as though

the bird were still out your way. Though how she could be, and you not know it, gets me. It's even a bigger game than Stella Wrightington, if my information is O.K. Have you heard or seen anything lately of a Beautiful Stranger or anything like that around Manzanita?... I enclose clipping of your story. What do you think of yourself in print?"

Banneker thought quite highly of himself in print as he read the article, which he immediately did. The other matter could wait; not that it was less important; quite the contrary; but he proposed to mull it over carefully and with a quiet mind, if he could ever get his mind back to its peaceful current again: meantime it was good for him to think of something quite dissociated from the main problem.

What writer has not felt the conscious red tingle in his cheeks at first sight of himself in the magnified personification of type? Here is something, once himself, now expanded far beyond individual limits, into the proportions of publicity, for all the world to measure and estimate and criticize. Ought it to have been done in just that way? Is there not too much "I" in the presentation? Would not the effect have been greater had the method been less personal? It seemed to Banneker that he himself stood forth in a stark nakedness of soul and thought, through those blatantly assertive words, shameless, challenging to public opinion, yet delightful to his own appreciation. On the whole it was good; better than he would have thought he could do.

What he had felt, in the writing of it, to be jerks and bumps were magically smoothed out in the finished product. At one point where the copy-reader's blue pencil had elided an adjective which the writer had deemed specially telling, he felt a sharp pang of disappointed resentment. Without that characterization the sentence seemed lifeless. Again, in another passage he wished that he had edited himself with more heed to the just word. Why had he designated the train as "rumbling" along the cut? Trains do not rumble between rock walls, he remembered; they move with a sustained and composite roar. And the finger-wringing malcontent who had vowed to "soom"; the

editorial pencil had altered that to "sue 'em," thereby robbing it of its special flavor. Perhaps this was in accordance with some occult rule of the trade. But it spoiled the paragraph for Banneker. Nevertheless he was thrilled and elate.... He wanted to show the article to Io. What would she think of it? She had read him accurately: it *was* in him to write. And she could help him, if only by — well, if only by being at hand.... But Gardner's letter! That meant that the pursuit was on again, more formidably this time. Gardner, the gadfly, stinging this modern Io out of her refuge of peace and safety!

He wrote and dispatched a message to the reporter in care of the Angelica City Herald:

> Glad to see you, but you are wasting your time. No such person could be here without my knowing it. Thanks for article.

That was as near an untruth as Banneker cared to go. In his own mind he defended it on the ground that the projected visit would, in fact, be time wasted for the journalist since he, Banneker, intended fully that Gardner should not see Io. Deep would have been his disgust and self-derision could he have observed the effect of the message upon the cynical and informed journalist who, however, did not receive it until the second day after its transmission, as he had been away on another assignment.

"The poor fish!" was Gardner's comment. "He doesn't even say that she isn't there. He's got to lie better than that if he goes into the newspaper game."

Further, the reporter had received a note from the cowman whom Ban and Io had encountered in the woods, modestly requesting five dollars in return for the warranted fact that a "swell young lady" had been seen in Banneker's company. Other journalistic matters were pressing, however; he concluded that the "Manzanita Mystery," as he built it up headline-wise in his ready mind, could wait a day or two longer.

Banneker, through the mechanical course of his office, debated the situation. Should he tell Io of the message? To do so would only add to her anxieties, probably to no good purpose, for he did not believe that she would desert Miss Van Arsdale, ill and help-

less, on any selfish consideration. Fidelity was one of the virtues with which he had unconsciously garlanded Io. Then, too, Gardner might not come anyway. If he did Banneker was innocently confident of his own ability to outwit the trained reporter and prevent his finding the object of his quest. A prospective and possible ally was forecast in the weather. Warning of another rainfall impending had come over the wire. As yet there was no sign visible from his far-horizoned home, except a filmy and changeful wreath of palest cloud with which Mount Carstairs was bedecked. Banneker decided for silence.

Miss Van Arsdale was much better when he rode over in the morning, but Io looked piteously worn and tired.

"You've had no rest," he accused her, away from the sick woman's hearing.

"Rest enough of its kind, but not much sleep," said Io.

"But you've got to have sleep," he insisted. "Let me stay and look after her to-night."

"It wouldn't be of any use."

"Why not?"

"I shouldn't sleep anyway. This house is haunted by spirits of unrest," said the girl fretfully. "I think I'll take a blanket and go out on the desert."

"And wake up to find a sidewinder crawling over you, and a tarantula nestling in your ear. Don't think of it."

"Ban," called the voice of Camilla Van Arsdale from the inner room, clear and firm as he had ever heard it.

He went in. She stretched out a hand to him. "It's good to see you, Ban. Have I worried you? I shall be up and about again to-morrow."

"Now, Miss Camilla," protested Banneker, "you mustn't—"

"I'm going to get up to-morrow," repeated the other immutably. "Don't be absurd about it. I'm not ill. It was only the sort of knock-down that I must expect from time to time. Within a day or two you'll see me riding over. . . . Ban, stand over there in that light. . . . What's that you've got on?"

"What, Miss Camilla?"

"That necktie. It isn't in your usual style. Where did you get it?"

"Sent to Angelica City for it. Don't you like it?" he returned, trying for the nonchalant air, but not too successfully.

"Not as well as your spotty butterflies," answered the woman jealously. "That's nonsense, though. Don't mind me, Ban," she added with a wry smile. "Plain colors are right for you. Browns, or blues, or reds, if they're not too bright. And you've tied it very well. Did it take you long to do it?"

Reddening and laughing, he admitted a prolonged and painful session before his glass. Miss Van Arsdale sighed. It was such a faint, abandoning breath of regret as might come from the breast of a mother when she sees her little son in his first pride of trousers.

"Go out and say good-night to Miss Welland," she ordered, "and tell her to go to bed. I've taken a sleeping powder."

Banneker obeyed. He rode home slowly and thoughtfully. His sleep was sound enough that night.

Breakfast-getting processes did not appeal to him when he awoke in the morning. He walked over, through the earliest light, to the hotel, where he made a meal of musty eggs, chemical-looking biscuits, and coffee of a rank hue and flavor, in an atmosphere of stale odors and flies, sickeningly different from the dainty ceremonials of Io's preparation. Rebuking himself for squeamishness, the station-agent returned to his office, caught an O.S. from the wire, took some general instructions, and went out to look at the weather. His glance never reached the horizon.

In the foreground where he had swung the hammock under the alamo it checked and was held, absorbed. A blanketed figure lay motionless in the curve of the meshwork. One arm was thrown across the eyes, warding a strong beam which had forced its way through the lower foliage. He tiptoed forward.

Io's breast was rising and falling gently in the hardly perceptible rhythm of her breathing. From the pale yellow surface of her dress, below the neck, protruded a strange, edged something, dun-colored, sharply defined and alien, which the man's surprised eyes failed to identify. Slowly the edge parted and flattened out, broadwise, displaying the marbled brilliance of the butterfly's inner wings, illumining the pale chastity of the sleeping figure as if with a quivering and evanescent jewel.

Banneker, shaken and thrilled, closed his eyes. He felt as if a soul had opened its secret glories to him. When, commanding himself, he looked again, the living gem was gone. The girl slept evenly.

Conning the position of the sun and the contour of the sheltering tree, Banneker estimated that in a half-hour or less a flood of sunlight would pour in upon the slumberer's face to awaken her. Cautiously withdrawing, he let himself into the shack, lighted his oil stove, put on water to boil, set out the coffee and the stand. He felt different about breakfast-getting now. Having prepared the arrangements for his prospective guest, he returned and leaned against the alamo, filling his eyes with still delight of the sleeper.

Youthful, untouched, fresh though the face was, in the revealing stillness of slumber, it suggested rather than embodied something indefinably ancient, a look as of far and dim inheritances, subtle, ironic, comprehending, and aloof; as if that delicate and strong beauty of hers derived intimately from the wellsprings of the race; as if womanhood, eternal triumphant, and elusive were visibly patterned there.

Banneker, leaning against the slender tree-trunk, dreamed over her, happily and aimlessly.

Io opened her eyes to meet his. She stirred softly and smiled at him.

"So you discovered me," she said.

"How long have you been here?"

She studied the sun a moment before replying. "Several hours."

"Did you walk over in the night?"

"No. You told me not to, you know. I waited till the dawn. Don't scold me, Ban. I was dead for want of sleep and I couldn't get it in the lodge. It's haunted, I tell you, with unpeaceful spirits. So I remembered this hammock."

"I'm not going to scold you. I'm going to feed you. The coffee's on."

"How good!" she cried, getting to her feet. "Am I a sight? I feel frowsy."

"There's a couple of buckets of water up in my room. Help yourself while I set out the breakfast."

In fifteen minutes she was down, freshened and joyous.

"I'll just take a bite and then run back to my patient," she said. "You can bring the blanket when you come. It's heavy for a three-mile tramp. . . . What are you looking thoughtful and sober about, Ban? Do you disapprove of my escapade?"

"That's a foolish question."

"It's meant to be. And it's meant to make you smile. Why don't you? You *are* worried. 'Fess up. What's happened?"

"I've had a letter from the reporter in Angelica City."

"Oh! Did he send your article?"

"He did. But that isn't the point. He says he's coming up here again."

"What for?"

"You."

"Does he know I'm here? Did he mention my name?"

"No. But he's had some information that probably points to you."

"What did you answer?"

Ban told her. "I think that will hold him off," he said hopefully.

"Then he's a very queer sort of reporter," returned Io scornfully out of her wider experience. "No; he'll come. And if he's any good, he'll find me."

"You can refuse to see him."

"Yes; but it's the mere fact of my being here that will probably give him enough to go on and build up a loathsome article. How I hate newspapers! . . . Ban," she appealed wistfully, "can't you stop him from coming? Must I go?"

"You must be ready to go."

"Not until Miss Camilla is well again," she declared obstinately. "But that will be in a day or two. Oh, well! What does it all matter! I've not much to pack up, anyway. How are you going to get me out?"

"That depends on whether Gardner comes, and how he comes."

He pointed to a darkening line above the southwestern horizon. "If that is what it looks like, we may be in for another flood, though I've never known two bad ones in a season."

Io beckoned quaintly to the far clouds. "Hurry! Hurry!" she summoned. "You wrecked me once. Now save me from the Vandal. Good-bye, Ban. And thank you for the lodging and the breakfast."

Emergency demands held the agent at his station all that day and evening. Trainmen brought news of heavy rains beyond the mountains. In the morning he awoke to find his little world hushed in a murky light and with a tingling apprehension of suspense in the atmosphere. High, gray cloud shapes hurried across the zenith to a conference of the storm powers, gathering at the horizon. Weather-wise from long observation, Banneker guessed that the outbreak would come before evening, and that, unless the sullen threat of the sky was deceptive, Manzanita would be shut off from rail communication within twelve hours thereafter. Having two hours' release at noon, he rode over to the lodge in the forest to return Io's blanket. He found the girl pensive, and Miss Van Arsdale apparently recovered to the status of her own normal and vigorous self.

"I've been telling Io," said the older woman, "that, since the rumor is out of her being here, she will almost certainly be found by the reporter. Too many people in the village know that I have a guest."

"How?" asked Banneker.

"From my marketing. Probably from Pedro."

"Very likely from the patron of the Sick Coyote that you and I met on our walk," added the girl.

"So the wise thing is for her to go," concluded Miss Van Arsdale. "Unless she is willing to risk the publicity."

"Yes," assented Io. "The wise thing is for me to go." She spoke in a curious tone, not looking at Banneker, not looking at anything outward and visible; her vision seemed somberly introverted.

"Not now, though," said Banneker.

"Why not?" asked both women. He answered Io.

"You called for a storm. You're going to get it. A big one. I could send you out on Number Eight, but that's a way-train and there's no telling where it would land you or when you'd get through. Besides, I don't believe Gardner is coming. I'd have heard from him by now. Listen!"

The slow pat-pat-pat of great raindrops ticked like a started clock on the roof. It ceased, and far overhead the great, quiet voice of the wind said, "Hush — sh — sh — sh — sh!", bidding the world lie still and wait.

"What if he does come?" asked Miss Van Arsdale

"I'll get word to you and get her out some way."

The storm burst on Banneker, homebound, just as he emerged from the woodland, in a wild, thrashing wind from the southwest and a downpour the most fiercely, relentlessly insistent that he had ever known. A cactus desert in the rare orgy of a rainstorm is a place of wonder. The monstrous, spiky forms trembled and writhed in ecstasy, heat-damned souls in their hour of respite, stretching out exultant arms to the bounteous sky. Tiny rivulets poured over the sand, which sucked them down with a thirsting, crisping whisper. A pair of wild doves, surprised and terrified, bolted close past the lone rider, so near that his mount shied and headed for the shelter of the trees again. A small snake, curving indecisively and with obvious bewilderment amidst the growth, paused to rattle a faint warning, half coiled in case the horse's step meant a new threat, then went on with a rather piteous air of not knowing where to find refuge against this cataclysm of the elements.

Lashing in the wind, a long tentacle of the giant ocatilla drew its cimeter-set thong across Ban's horse which incontinently bolted. The rider lifted up his voice and yelled in sheer, wild, defiant joy of the tumult. A lesser ocatilla thorn gashed his ear so that the blood mingled with the rain that poured down his face. A pod of the fishhook-barbed cholla drove its points through his trousers into the flesh of his knee and, detaching itself from the stem, as is the detestable habit of this vegetable blood-seeker, clung there like a live thing of prey, from barbs which must later be removed delicately and separately with the

cold steel. Blindly homing, a jack-rabbit ran almost beneath the horse's hooves, causing him to shy again, this time into a bulky vizcaya, as big as a full-grown man, and inflicting upon Ban a new species of scarification. It did not matter. Nothing mattered. He rode on, knees tight, lines loose, elate, shouting, singing, acclaiming the storm which was setting its irrefragable limits to the world wherein he and Io would still live close, a few golden days longer.

What he picked from the wire when he reached it confirmed his hopes. The track was threatened in a dozen places. Repair crews were gathering. Already the trains were staggering along, far behind their schedule. They would, of course, operate as far as possible, but no reliance was to be placed upon their movements until further notice. Through the night traffic continued, but with the coming of the morning and the settling down of a soft, seeping, unintermittent pour of gray rain, the situation had clarified. Nothing came through. Complete stoppage, east and west. Between Manzanita and Stanwood the track was out, and in the other direction Dry Bed Arroyo was threatening. Banneker reported progress to the lodge and got back, soaked and happy. Io was thoughtful and content.

Late that afternoon the station-agent had a shock which jarred him quite out of his complacent security. Denny, the operator at Stanwood, wired, saying:

Party here anxious to get through to Manzanita quick. Could auto make upper desert?

No (clicked Banneker in response). Describe party.

The answer came back confirming his suspicion:

Thin, nice-spoken, wears goggles, smokes cork-tips. Arrived Five from Angelica held here.

Tell impossible by any route (instructed Banneker). Wire result.

An hour later came the reply:

Won't try to-night. Probably horse to-morrow.

Here was a problem, indeed, fit to chill the untimely self-congratulations of Banneker. Should the reporter come in —

and come he would if it were humanly possible, by Banneker's estimate of him — it would be by the only route which gave exit to the west. On the other side the flooded arroyo cut off escape. To try to take Io out through the forest, practically trackless, in that weather, or across the channeled desert, would be too grave a risk. To all intents and purposes they were marooned on an island with no reasonable chance of exit — except! To Banneker's feverishly searching mind reverted a local legend. Taking a chance on missing some emergency call, he hurried over to the village and interviewed, through the persuasive interpretation of sundry drinks, an aged and bearded wreck whose languid and chipped accents spoke of a life originally far alien to the habitudes of the Sick Coyote where he was fatalistically awaiting his final attack of delirium tremens.

Banneker returned from that interview with a map upon which had been scrawled a few words in shaky, scholarly writing.

"But one doesn't say it's safe, mind you," had warned the shell of Lionel Streatham in his husky pipe. "It's only as a sporting offer that one would touch it. And the courses may have changed in seven years."

Denny wired in the morning that the inquiring traveler had set out from Manzanita, unescorted, on horseback, adding the prediction that he would have a hell of a trip, even if he got through at all. Late that afternoon Gardner arrived at the station, soaked, hollow-eyed, stiff, exhausted, and cheerful. He shook hands with the agent.

"How do you like yourself in print?" he inquired.

"Pretty well," answered Banneker. "It read better than I expected."

"It always does, until you get old in the business. How would you like a New York job on the strength of it?"

Banneker stared. "You mean that I could get on a paper just by writing that?"

"I didn't say so. Though I've known poorer stuff land more experienced men."

"More experienced; that's the point, isn't it? I've had none at all."

"So much the better. A metropolitan paper prefers to take a man fresh and train him to its own ways. There's your advantage if you can show natural ability. And you can."

"I see," muttered Banneker thoughtfully.

"Where does Miss Van Arsdale live?" asked the reporter without the smallest change of tone.

"What do you want to see Miss Van Arsdale for?" returned the other, his instantly defensive manner betraying him to the newspaper man.

"You know as well as I do," smiled Gardner.

"Miss Van Arsdale has been ill. She's a good deal of a recluse. She doesn't like to see people."

"Does her visitor share that eccentricity?"

Banneker made no reply.

"See here, Banneker," said the reporter earnestly; "I'd like to know why you're against me in this thing."

"What thing?" fenced the agent.

"My search for Io Welland."

"Who is Io Welland, and what are you after her for?" asked Banneker steadily.

"Apart from being the young lady that you've been escorting around the local scenery," returned the imperturbable journalist, "she's the most brilliant and interesting figure in the younger set of the Four Hundred. She's a newspaper beauty. She's copy. She's news. And when she gets into a railroad wreck and disappears from the world for weeks, and her supposed fiancé, the heir to a dukedom, makes an infernal ass of himself over it all and practically gives himself away to the papers, she's big news."

"And if she hasn't done any of these things," retorted Banneker, drawing upon some of Camilla Van Arsdale's wisdom, brought to bear on the case, "she's libel, isn't she?"

"Hardly libel. But she isn't safe news until she's identified. You see, I'm playing an open game with you. I'm here to identify her, with half a dozen newspaper photos. Want to see 'em?"

"No, thank you."

"Not interested? Are you going to take me over to Miss Van Arsdale's?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why should I? It's no part of my business as an employee of the road."

"As to that, I've got a letter from the Division Superintendent asking you to further my inquiry in any possible way. Here it is."

Banneker took and read the letter. While not explicit, it was sufficiently direct.

"That's official, isn't it?" said Gardner mildly.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"And this is official," added Banneker calmly. "The company can go to hell. Tell that to the D.S. with my compliments, will you?"

"Certainly not. I don't want to get you into trouble. I like you. But I've got to land this story. If you won't take me to the place, I'll find some one in the village that will. You can't prevent my going there, you know."

"Can't I?" Banneker's voice had grown low and cold. A curious light shone in his eyes. There was an ugly flicker of smile on his set mouth.

The reporter rose from the chair into which he had wetly slumped. He walked over to face his opponent who was standing at his desk. Banneker, lithe, powerful, tense, was half again as large as the other; obviously more muscular, better-conditioned, more formidable in every way. But there is about a man, singly and selflessly intent upon his job in hand, an inner potency impossible to obstruct. Banneker recognized it; inwardly admitted, too, the unsoundness of the swift, protective rage rising within himself.

"I don't propose to make trouble for you or to have trouble with you," said the reporter evenly. "But I'm going to Miss Van Arsdale's unless I'm shot on the way there."

"That's all right," returned the agent, mastering himself. "I beg your pardon for threatening you. But you'll have to find your own way. Will you put up here for the night, again?"

"Thanks. Glad to, if it won't trouble you. See you later."

"Perhaps not. I'm turning in early. I'll leave the shack unlocked for you."

Gardner opened the outer door and was blown back into the station by an explosive gust of soaking wind.

"On second thought," said he, "I don't think I'll try to go out there this evening. The young lady can't very well get away to-night, unless she has wings, and it's pretty damp for flying. Can I get dinner over at the village?"

"Such as it is. I'll go over with you."

At the entrance to the unclean little hotel they parted, Banneker going further to find Mindle the "teamer," whom he could trust and with whom he held conference, brief and very private. They returned to the station together in the gathering darkness, got a hand car onto the track, and loaded it with a strange burden, after which Mindle disappeared into the storm with the car while Banneker wired to Stanwood an imperative call for a relief for next day even though the substitute should have to walk the twenty-odd miles. Thereafter he made, from the shack, a careful selection of food with special reference to economy of bulk, fastened it deftly beneath his poncho, saddled his horse, and set out for the Van Arsdale lodge. The night was pitch-black when he entered the area of the pines, now sonorous with the rush of the upper winds.

Io saw the gleam of his flashlight and ran to the door to meet him.

"Are you ready?" he asked briefly.

"I can be in fifteen minutes." She turned away, asking no questions.

"Dress warmly," he said. "It's an all-night trip. By the way, can you swim?"

"For hours at a time."

Camilla Van Arsdale entered the room. "Are you taking her away, Ban? Where?"

"To Miradero, on the Southwestern & Sierra."

"But that's insanity," protested the other. "Sixty miles, isn't it? And over trailless desert."

"All of that. But we're not going across country. We're going by water."

"By water? Ban, you *are* out of your mind. Where is there any waterway?"

"Dry Bed Arroyo. It's running bank-full. My boat is waiting there."

"But it will be dangerous. Terribly dangerous. Io, you mustn't."

"I'll go," said the girl quietly, "if Ban says so."

"There's no other way out. And it isn't so dangerous if you're used to a boat. Old Streatham made it seven years ago in the big flood. Did it in a bark canoe on a hundred-dollar bet. The Arroyo takes you out to the Little Bowleg and that empties into the Rio Solano, and there you are! I've got his map."

"Map?" cried Miss Van Arsdale. "What use is a map when you can't see your hand before your face?"

"Give this wind a chance," answered Banneker. "Within two hours the clouds will have broken and we'll have moonlight to go by.... The Angelica Herald man is over at the hotel now," he added.

"May I take a suitcase?" asked Io.

"Of course. I'll strap it to your pony if you'll get it ready. Miss Camilla, what shall we do with the pony? Hitch him under the bridge?"

"If you're determined to take her, I'll ride over with you and bring him back. Io, think! Is it worth the risk? Let the reporter come. I can keep him away from you."

A brooding expression was in the girl's deep eyes as she turned them, not to the speaker, but to Banneker. "No," she said. "I've got to get away sooner or later. I'd rather go this way. It's more — it's more of a pattern with all the rest; better than stupidly waving good-bye from the rear of a train."

"But the danger."

"*Che sarà, sarà,*" returned Io lightly. "I'll trust him to take care of me."

While Ban went out to prepare the horses with the aid of Pedro, strictly enjoined to secrecy, the two women got Io's few things together.

"I can't thank you," said the girl, looking up as she snapped the lock of her case. "It simply isn't a case for thanking. You've done too much for me."

The older woman disregarded it. "How much are you hurting Ban?" she said, with musing eyes fixed on the dim and pure outline of the girlish face.

"I? Hurt him?"

"Of course he won't realize it until you've gone. Then I'm afraid to think what is coming to him."

"And I'm afraid to think what is coming to me," replied the girl, very low.

"Ah, you!" retorted her hostess, dismissing that consideration with contemptuous lightness. "You have plenty of compensations, plenty of resources."

"Hasn't he?"

"Perhaps. Up to now. What will he do when he wakes up to an empty world?"

"Write, won't he? And then the world won't be empty."

"He'll think it so. That is why I'm sorry for him."

"Won't you be sorry a little for me?" pleaded the girl. "Anyway, for the part of me that I'm leaving here? Perhaps it's the very best of me."

Miss Van Arsdale shook her head. "Oh, no! A pleasantly vivid dream of changed and restful things. That's all. Your waking will be only a sentimental and perfumed regret — a sachet-powder sorrow."

"You're bitter."

"I don't want him hurt," protested the other. "Why did you come here? What should a girl like you, feverish and sensation-loving and artificial, see in a boy like Ban to charm you?"

"Ah, don't you understand? It's just because my world has been too dressed up and painted and powdered that I feel the charm of — of — well, of ease of existence. He's as easy as an animal. There's something about him — you must have felt it — a sort of impassioned sense of the gladness of life; when he has those accesses he's like a young god, or a faun. But he doesn't know his own power. At those times he might do anything."

She shivered a little and her lids drooped over the luster of her dreaming eyes.

"And you want to tempt him out of this to a world where he would be a wretched misfit," accused the older woman.

"Do I? No; I think I don't. I think I'd rather hold him in my mind as he is here: a happy eremite; no, a restrained pagan. Oh, it's foolish to seek definitions for him. He isn't definable. He's Ban..."

"And when you get back into the world, what will you do, I wonder?"

"I won't send for him, if that's what you mean."

"But what *will* you do, I wonder?"

"I wonder," repeated Io somberly.

## Chapter XIII

Silently they rode through the stir and thresh of the night, the two women and the man. For guidance along the woods trail they must trust to the finer sense of their horses whose heads they could not see in the closed-in murk. A desultory spray fell upon them as the wind wrenched at the boughs overhead, but the rain had ceased. Infinitely high, infinitely potent sounded the imminent tumult of the invisible Powers of the night, on whose sufferance they moved, tiny, obscure, and unharmed. It filled all the distances.

Debouching upon the open desert, they found their range of vision slightly expanded. They could dimly perceive each other. The horses drew closer together. With his flash covered by his poncho, Banneker consulted a compass and altered their course, for he wished to give the station, to which Gardner might have returned, a wide berth. Io moved up abreast of him as he stood, studying the needle. Had he turned the light upward he would have seen that she was smiling. Whether he would have interpreted that smile, whether, indeed, she could have interpreted it herself, is doubtful.

Presently they picked up the line of telegraph poles, well beyond the station, just the faintest suggestion of gaunt rigor against the troubled sky, and skirted them, moving more rapidly in the confidence of assured direction. A very gradual, diffused alleviation of the darkness began to be felt. The clouds were thinning. Something ahead of them hissed in a soft, full, insistent monosonance. Banneker threw up a shadowy arm. They dismounted on the crest of a tiny desert clifflet, now become the bank of a black current which nuzzled and nibbled into its flanks.

Io gazed intently at the flood which was to deliver her out of the hands of the Philistine. How far away the other bank of the newborn stream might be, she could only guess from the vague rush in her ears. The arroyo's water slipped ceaselessly, objectlessly away from beneath her strained vision, smooth, suave,

even, effortless, like the process of some unhurried and mighty mechanism. Now and again a desert plant, uprooted from its arid home, eddied joyously past her, satiated for once of its life-long thirst; and farther out she thought to have a glimpse of some dead and whitish animal. But these were minor blemishes on a great, lustrous ribbon of silken black, unrolled and re-rolled from darkness into darkness.

"It's beckoning us," said Io, leaning to Banneker, her hand on his shoulder.

"We must wait for more light," he answered.

"Will you trust yourself to *that?*" asked Camilla Van Arsdale, with a gesture of fear and repulsion toward the torrent.

"Anywhere!" returned Io. There was exaltation in her voice.

"I can't understand it," cried the older woman. "How do you know what may lie before you?"

"That is the thrill of it."

"There may be death around the first curve. It's so unknown; so secret and lawless."

"Ah, and I'm lawless!" cried Io. "I could defy the gods on a night like this!"

She flung her arms aloft, in a movement of sweet, wild abandon, and, as if in response to an incantation, the sky was reft asunder and the moon rushed forth, free for the moment of the clutching clouds, fugitive, headlong, a shining Mænad of the heavens, surrounded by the rush and whirl that had whelmed earth and its waters and was hurrying them to an unknown, mad destiny.

"Now we can see our way," said Banneker, the practical.

He studied the few rods of sleek, foamless water between him and the farther bank, and, going to the steel boat which Mindle had brought to the place on the hand car, took brief inventory of its small cargo. Satisfied, he turned to load in Io's few belongings. He shipped the oars.

"I'll let her go stern-first," he explained; "so that I can see what we're coming to and hold her if there's trouble."

"But can you see?" objected Miss Van Arsdale, directing a troubled look at the breaking sky.

"If we can't, we'll run her ashore until we can."

He handed Io the flashlight and the map.

"You'll want me in the bow seat if we're traveling reversed," said she.

He assented. "Good sailorwoman!"

"I don't like it," protested Miss Van Arsdale. "It's a mad business. Ban, you oughtn't to take her."

"It's too late to talk of that," said Io.

"Ready?" questioned Banneker.

"Yes."

He pushed the stern of the boat into the stream, and the current laid it neatly and powerfully flat to the sheer bank. Io kissed Camilla Van Arsdale quickly and got in.

"We'll wire you from Miradero," she promised. "You'll find the message in the morning."

The woman, mastering herself with a difficult effort, held out her hand to Banneker.

"If you won't be persuaded," she said, "then good —"

"No," he broke in quickly. "That's bad luck. We shall be all right."

"Good luck, then," returned his friend, and turned away into the night.

Banneker, with one foot in the boat, gave a little shove and caught up his oars. An unseen hand of indeterminable might grasped the keel and moved them quietly, evenly, outward and forward, puppets given into the custody of the unregarding powers. Oars poised and ready, Ban sat with his back toward his passenger, facing watchfully downstream.

Leaning back into the curve of the bow, Io gave herself up to the pulsing sweep of the night. Far, far above her stirred a cosmic tumult. The air might have been filled with vast wings, invisible and incessant in the night of wonders. The moon plunged headlong through the clouds, now submerged, now free, like a strong swimmer amidst surf. She moved to the music of a tremendous, trumpeting note, the voice of the unleashed Spring, male and mighty, exulting in his power, while beneath, the responsive, desirous earth thrilled and trembled and was glad.

The boat, a tiny speck on the surface of chaos, darted and checked and swerved lightly at the imperious bidding of unguessed forces, reaching up from the depths to pluck at it in elfish sportiveness. Only when Ban thrust down the oar-blades, as he did now and again to direct their course or avoid some obstacle, was Io made sensible, through the jar and tremor of the whole structure, how swiftly they moved. She felt the spirit of the great motion, of which they were a minutely inconsiderable part, enter into her soul. She was inspired of it, freed, elated, glorified. She lifted up her voice and sang. Ban, turning, gave her one quick look of comprehension, then once more was intent and watchful of their master and servitor, the flood.

"Ban," she called.

He tossed an oar to indicate that he had heard

"Come back and sit by me."

He seemed to hesitate.

"Let the boat go where it wants to! The river will take care of us. It's a good river, and so strong! I think it loves to have us here."

Ban shook his head.

"'Let the great river bear us to the sea,'" sang Io in her fresh and thrilling voice, stirring the uttermost fibers of his being with delight. "Ban, can't you trust the river and the night and — and the mad gods? I can."

Again he shook his head. In his attitude she sensed a new concentration upon something ahead. She became aware of a strange stir that was not of the air nor the water.

"Hush — sh — sh — sh — sh!" said something unseen, with an immense effect of restraint and enforced quiet.

The boat slewed sharply as Banneker checked their progress with a downthrust of oars. He edged in toward the farther bank which was quite flat, studying it with an eye to the most favoring spot, having selected which, he ran the stern up with several hard shoves, leapt out, hauled the body of the craft free from the balked and snatching current, and held out a hand to his passenger.

"What is it?" she asked as she joined him.

"I don't know. I'm trying to think where I've heard that noise before." He pondered. "Ah, I've got it! It was when I was out on the coast in the big rains, and a few million tons of river-bank let go all holds and smushed down into the stream.... What's on your map?"

He bent over it, conning its detail by the light of the flash which she turned on.

"We should be about here," he indicated, touching the paper. "I'll go ahead and take a look."

"Shan't I go with you?"

"Better stay quiet and get all the rest you can."

He was gone some twenty minutes. "There's a big, fresh-looking split-off in the opposite bank," he reported; "and the water looks fizzy and whirly around there. I think we'll give her a little time to settle. A sudden shift underneath might suck us down. The water's rising every minute, which makes it worth while waiting. Besides, it's dark just now."

"Do you believe in fate?" asked the girl abruptly, as he seated himself on the sand beside her. "That's a silly, schoolgirl thing to say, isn't it?" she added. "But I was thinking of this boat being there in the middle of the dry desert, just when we needed it most."

"It had been there some time," pointed out Banneker. "And if we couldn't have come this way, I'd have found some other."

"I believe you would," crowed Io softly.

"So, I don't believe in fate; not the ready-made kind. Things aren't that easy. If I did —"

"If you did?" she prompted as he paused.

"I'd get back into the boat with you and throw away the oars."

"I dare you!" she cried recklessly.

"We'd go whirling and spinning along," he continued with dreams in his voice, "until dawn came, and then we'd go ashore and camp."

"Where?"

"How should I know? In the Enchanted Canyon where it

enters the Mountains of Fulfillment.... They're not on this map."

"They're not on any map. More's the pity. And then?"

"Then we'd rest. And after that we'd climb to the Plateau Beyond the Clouds where the Fadeless Gardens are, and there..."

"And there?"

"There we'd hear the Undying Voices singing."

"Should we sing, too?"

"Of course. 'For they who attain these heights, through pain of upward toil and the rigors of abstention, are as the demigods, secure above evil and the fear thereof.'"

"I don't know what that is, but I hate the 'upward toil' part of it, and the 'abstention' even more. We ought to be able to become demigods without all that, just because we wish it. In a fairy-tale, anyway. I don't think you're a really competent fairy-tale-monger, Ban."

"You haven't let me go on to the 'live happy ever after' part," he complained.

"Ah, that's the serpent, the lying, poisoning little serpent, always concealed in the gardens of dreams. They don't, Ban; people don't live happy ever after. I could believe in fairy-tales up to that point. Just there ugly old Experience holds up her bony finger — she's a horrid hag, Ban, but we'd all be dead or mad without her — and points to the wriggling little snake."

"In my garden," said he, "she'd have shining wings and eyes that could look to the future as well as to the past, and immortal Hope for a lover. It would be worth all the toil and the privation."

"Nobody ever made up a Paradise," said the girl fretfully, "but what the Puritan in him set the road with sharp stones and bordered it with thorns and stings.... Look, Ban! Here's the moon come back to us.... And see what's laughing at us and our dreams."

On the crest of a sand-billow sprawled a huge organ-cactus, brandishing its arms in gnomish derision of their presence.

"How can one help but believe in foul spirits with that thing

to prove their existence?" she said. "And, look! There's the good spirit in front of that shining cloud."

She pointed to a yucca in full, creamy flower; a creature of unearthly purity in the glow of the moon, a dream-maiden beckoning at the gates of darkness to a world of hidden and ineffable beauty.

"When I saw my first yucca in blossom," said Banneker, "it was just before sunrise after I had been riding all night, and I came on it around a dip in the hills, standing alone against a sky of pearl and silver. It made me think of a ghost, the ghost of a girl who had died too young to know womanhood, died while she was asleep and dreaming pale, soft dreams, never to be fulfilled."

"That's the injustice of death," she answered. "To take one before one knows and has felt and been all that there is to know and feel and be."

"Yet"— he turned a slow smile to her — "you were just now calling Experience bad names; a horrid hag, wasn't it?"

"At least, she's life," retorted the girl.

"Yes. She's life."

"Ban, I want to go on. The whole universe is in motion. Why must we stand still?"

They reëmbarked. The grip of the hurrying depths took them past crinkly water, lustrously bronze in the moonlight where the bank had given way, and presently delivered them, around the shoulder of a low, brush-crowned bluff, into the keeping of a swollen creek. Here the going was more tricky. There were shoals and whirls at the bends, and plunging flotsam to be avoided. Banneker handled the boat with masterly address, easing her through the swift passages, keeping her, with a touch here and a dip there, to the deepest flow, swerving adroitly to dodge the trees and brush which might have punctured the thin metal. Once he cried out and lunged at some object with an unshipped oar. It rolled and sank, but not before Io had caught the contour of a pasty face. She was startled rather than horrified at this apparition of death. It seemed an accessory proper to the pattern of the bewitched night.

Through a little, silvered surf of cross-waves, they were shot, after an hour of this uneasy going, into the broad, clean sweep

of the Little Bowleg River. After the troubled progress of the lesser current it seemed very quiet and secure; almost placid. But the banks slipped by in an endless chain. Presently they came abreast of three horsemen riding the river trail, who urged their horses into a gallop, keeping up with them for a mile or more. As they fell away, Io waved a handkerchief at them, to which they made response by firing a salvo from their revolvers into the air.

"We're making better than ten miles an hour," Banneker called over his shoulder to his passenger.

They shot between the split halves of a little, scraggly, ramshackle town, danced in white water where the ford had been, and darted onward. Now Banneker began to hold against the current, scanning the shores until, with a quick wrench, he brought the stern around and ran it up on a muddy bit of strand.

"Grub!" he announced gayly.

Languor had taken possession of Io, the languor of one who yields to unknown and fateful forces. Passive and at peace, she wanted nothing but to be wafted by the current to whatever far bourne might await her. That there should be such things as railway trains and man-made schedules in this world of winds and mystery and the voice of great waters, was hard to believe; hardly worth believing in any case. Better not to think of it: better to muse on her companion, building fire as the first man had built for the first woman, to feed and comfort her in an environment of imminent fears.

Coffee, when her man brought it, seemed too artificial for the time and place. She shook her head. She was not hungry.

"You must," insisted Ban. He pointed downstream where the murk lay heavy. "We shall run into more rain. You will need the warmth and support of food."

So, because there were only they two on the face of the known earth, woman and man, the woman obeyed the man. To her surprise, she found that she was hungry, ardently hungry. Both ate heartily. It was a silent meal; little spoken except about the chances and developments of the journey, until she got to her feet. Then she said:

"I shall never, as long as I live, wherever I go, whatever I do, know anything like this again. I shall not want to. I want it to stand alone."

"It will stand alone," he answered.

They met the rain within half an hour, a wall-like mass of it. It blotted out everything around them. The roar of it cut off sound, as the mass of it cut off sight. Fortunately the boat was now going evenly as in an oiled groove. By feeling, Io knew that her guide was moving from his seat, and guessed that he was bailing. The spare poncho, put in by Miss Van Arsdale, protected her. She was jubilant with the thresh of the rain in her face, the sweet, smooth motion of the boat beneath her, the wild abandon of the night, which, entering into her blood, had transmuted it into soft fire.

How long she crouched, exultant and exalted, under the beat of the storm, she could not guess. She half emerged from her possession with a strange feeling that the little craft was being irresistibly drawn forward and downward in what was now a suction rather than a current. At the same time she felt the spring and thrust of Banneker's muscles, straining at the oars. She dipped a hand into the water. It ridged high around her wrists with a startling pressure. What was happening?

Through the uproar she could dimly hear Ban's voice. He seemed to be swearing insanely. Dropping to her hands and knees, for the craft was now swerving and rocking, she crept to him.

"The dam! The dam! The dam!" he shouted. "I'd forgotten about it. Go back. Turn on the flash. Look for shore."

Against rather than into that impenetrable enmeshment of rain, the glow dispersed itself ineffectually. Io sat, not frightened so much as wondering. Her body ached in sympathy with the panting, racking toil of the man at the oars, the labor of an indomitable pigmy, striving to thwart a giant's will. Suddenly he shouted. The boat spun. Something low and a shade blacker than the dull murk about them, with a white, whispering ripple at its edge, loomed. The boat's prow drove into soft mud as Banneker, all but knocking her overboard in his dash, plunged

to the land and with one powerful lift, brought boat and cargo to safety.

For a moment he leaned, gasping, against a stump. When he spoke, it was to reproach himself bitterly.

"We must have come through the town. There's a dam below it. I'd forgotten it. My God! If we hadn't had the luck to strike shore."

"Is it a high dam?" she asked.

"In this flood we'd be pounded to death the moment we were over. Listen! You can hear it."

The rain had diminished a little. Above its insistence sounded a deeper, more formidable beat and thrill.

"We must be quite close to it," she said.

"A few rods, probably. Let me have the light. I want to explore before we start out."

Much sooner than she had expected, he was back. He groped for and took her hand. His own was steady, but his voice shook as he said:

"Io."

"It's the first time you've called me that. Well, Ban?"

"Can you stand it to — to have me tell you something?"

"Yes."

"We're not on the shore."

"Where, then? An island?"

"There aren't any islands here. It must be a bit of the mainland cut off by the flood."

"I'm not afraid, if that's what you mean. We can stand it until dawn."

A wavelet lapped quietly across her foot. She withdrew it and with that involuntary act came understanding. Her hand, turning in his, pressed close, palm cleaving to palm.

"How much longer?" she asked in a whisper.

"Not long. It's just a tiny patch. And the river is rising every minute."

"How long?" she persisted.

"Perhaps two hours. Perhaps less. My good God! If there's any special hell for criminal fools, I ought to go to it for bringing you to this," he burst out in agony.

"I brought you. Whatever there is, we'll go to it together."

"You're wonderful beyond all wonders. Aren't you afraid?"

"I don't know. It isn't so much fear, though I dread to think of that hammering-down weight of water."

"Don't!" he cried brokenly. "I can't bear to think of you —" He lifted his head sharply. "Isn't it lightening up? Look! Can you see shore? We might be quite near."

She peered out, leaning forward. "No; there's nothing." Her hand turned within his, released itself gently. "I'm not afraid," she said, speaking clear and swift. "It isn't that. But I'm — rebellious. I hate the idea of it, of ending everything; the unfairness of it. To have to die without knowing the — the realness of life. Unfulfilled. It isn't fair," she accused breathlessly. "Ban, it's what we were saying. Back there on the river-bank where the yucca stands. I don't want to go — I can't bear to go — before I've known... before..."

Her arms crept to enfold him. Her lips sought his, tremulous, surrendering, demanding in surrender. With all the passion and longing that he had held in control, refusing to acknowledge even their existence, as if the mere recognition of them would have blemished her, he caught her to him. He heard her, felt her sob once. The roar of the cataract was louder, more insistent in his ears... or was it the rush of the blood in his veins?... Io cried out, a desolate and hungry cry, for he had wrenched his mouth from hers. She could feel the inner man abruptly withdrawn, concentrated elsewhere. She opened her eyes upon an appalling radiance wherein his face stood out clear, incredulous, then suddenly eager and resolute.

"It's a headlight!" he cried. "A train! Look, Io! The mainland. It's only a couple of rods away."

He slipped from her arms, ran to the boat.

"What are you going to do?" she called weakly. "Ban! You can never make it."

"I've got to. It's our only chance."

As he spoke, he was fumbling under the seat. He brought out a coil of rope. Throwing off poncho. coat, and waistcoat, he coiled the lengths around his body.

"Let me swim with you," she begged.

"You're not strong enough."

"I don't care. We'd go together...I — I can't face it alone, Ban."

"You'll have to. Or give up our only chance of life. You must, Io. If I shouldn't get across, you may try it; the chances of the current might help you. But not until after you're sure I haven't made it. You must wait."

"Yes," she said submissively.

"As soon as I get to shore, I'll throw the rope across to you. Listen for it. I'll keep throwing until it strikes where you can get it."

"I'll give you the light."

"That may help. Then you make fast under the forward seat of the boat. Be sure it's tight."

"Yes, Ban."

"Twitch three times on the rope to let me know when you're ready and shove out and upstream as strongly as you can."

"Can you hold it against the current?"

"I must. If I do, you'll drift around against the bank. If I don't — I'll follow you."

"No, Ban," she implored. "Not you, too. There's no need—"

"I'll follow you," said he. "Now, Io."

He kissed her gently, stepped back, took a run and flung himself upward and outward into the ravening current.

She saw a foaming thresh that melted into darkness...

Time seemed to have stopped for her. She waited, waited, waited in a world wherein only Death waited with her.... Ban was now limp and lifeless somewhere far downstream, asprawl in the swiftness, rolling a pasty face to the sky like that grisly wayfarer who had hailed them silently in the upper reach of the river, a messenger and prophet of their fate. The rising waters eddied about her feet. The boat stirred uneasily. Mechanically she drew it back from the claim of the flood. A light blow fell upon her cheek and neck.

It was the rope.

Instantly and intensely alive, Io tautened it and felt the jerk

of Ban's signal. With expert hands she made it fast, shipped the oars, twitched the cord thrice, and, venturing as far as she dared into the deluge, pushed with all her force and threw herself over the stern.

The rope twanged and hummed like a gigantic bass-string. Io crawled to the oars, felt the gunwale dip and right again, and, before she could take a stroke, was pressed against the far bank. She clambered out and went to Banneker, guiding herself by the light. His face, in the feeble glow, shone, twisted in agony. He was shaking from head to foot. The other end of the rope which had brought her to safety was knotted fast around his waist.... So he would have followed, as he said!

Through Io's queer, inconsequent brain flitted a grotesque conjecture: what would the newspapers make of it if she had been found, washed up on the river-bank, and the Manzanita agent of the Atkinson & St. Philip Railroad Company drowned and haltered by a long tether to his boat, near by? A sensational story!...

She went to Banneker, still helplessly shaking, and put her firm, slight hands on his shoulders.

"It's all right, Ban," she said soothingly. "We're out of it."

## Chapter XIV

"Arrived safe" was the laconic message delivered to Miss Camilla Van Arsdale by Banneker's substitute when, after a haggard night, she rode over in the morning for news.

Banneker himself returned on the second noon, after much and roundabout wayfaring. He had little to say of the night journey; nothing of the peril escaped. Miss Welland had caught a morning train for the East. She was none the worse for the adventurous trip. Camilla Van Arsdale, noting his rapt expression and his absent, questing eyes, wondered what underlay such reticence. . . . What had been the manner of their parting?

It had, indeed, been anti-climax. Both had been a little shy, a little furtive. Each, perhaps feeling a mutual strain, wanted the parting over, restlessly desiring the sedative of thought and quiet memory after that stress. The desperate peril from which they had been saved seemed a lesser crisis, leading from a greater and more significant one; leading to — what? For his part Banneker was content to "breathe and wait." When they should meet again, it would be determined. How and when the encounter might take place, he did not trouble himself to consider. The whole universe was moulded and set for that event. Meantime the glory was about him; he could remember, recall, repeat, interpret. . .

For the hundredth time — or was it the thousandth? — he reconstructed that last hour of theirs together in the station at Miradero, waiting for the train. What had they said to each other? Commonplaces, mostly, and at times with effort, as if they were making conversation. They two! After that passionate and revealing moment between life and death on the island. What should he have said to her? Begged her to stay? On what basis? How could he? . . . As the distant roar of the train warned them that the time of parting was close, it was she who broke through that strange restraint, turning upon him her old-time limpid and resolute regard.

"Ban; promise me something."

"Anything."

"There may be a time coming for us when you won't understand."

"Understand what?"

"Me. Perhaps I shan't understand myself."

"You'll always understand yourself, Io."

"If that comes — when that comes — Ban, there's something in the book, *our* book, that I've left you to read."

"'The Voices'?"

"Yes. I've fastened the pages together so that you can't read it too soon."

"When, then?"

"When I tell you...No; not when I tell you. When — oh, when you must! You'll read it, and afterward, when you think of me, you'll think of that, too. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Always."

"No matter what happens?"

"No matter what happens."

"It's like a litany." She laughed tremulously...."Here's the train. Good-bye, dear."

He felt the tips of slender fingers on his temples, the light, swift pressure of cold lips on his mouth....While the train pulled out, she stood on the rear platform, looking, looking. She was very still. All motion, all expression seemed centered in the steady gaze which dwindled away from him, became vague... featureless...vanished in a lurch of the car.

Banneker, at home again, planted a garden of dreams, and lived in it, mechanically acceptant of the outer world, resentful of any intrusion upon that flowerful retreat. Even of Miss Van Arsdale's.

Not for days thereafter did the Hunger come. It began as a little gnawing doubt and disappointment. It grew to a devastating, ravening starvation of the heart, for sign or sight or word of Io Welland. It drove him out of his withered seclusion, to seek

Miss Van Arsdale, in the hope of hearing Io's name spoken. But Miss Van Arsdale scarcely referred to Io. She watched Banneker with unconcealed anxiety.

...Why had there been no letter?...

Appeasement came in the form of a package addressed in her handwriting. Avidly he opened it. It was the promised Bible, mailed from New York City. On the fly-leaf was written "I. O. W. to E. B." — nothing more. He went through it page by page, seeking marked passages. There was none. The doubt settled down on him again. The Hunger bit into him more savagely.

...Why didn't she write? A word! Anything!

...Had she written Miss Van Arsdale?

At first it was intolerable that he should be driven to ask about her from any other person; about Io, who had clasped him in the Valley of the Shadow, whose lips had made the imminence of death seem a light thing! The Hunger drove him to it.

Yes; Miss Van Arsdale had heard. Io Welland was in New York, and well. That was all. But Banneker felt an undermining reserve.

Long days of changeless sunlight on the desert, an intolerable glare. From the doorway of the lonely station Banneker stared out over leagues of sand and cactus, arid, sterile, hopeless, promiseless. Life was like that. Four weeks now since Io had left him. And still, except for the Bible, no word from her. No sign. Silence.

Why that? Anything but that! It was too unbearable to his helpless masculine need of her. He could not understand it. He could not understand anything. Except the Hunger. That he understood well enough now....

At two o'clock of a savagely haunted night, Banneker staggered from his cot. For weeks he had not known sleep otherwise than in fitful passages. His brain was hot and blank. Although the room was pitch-dark, he crossed it unerringly to a shelf and took down his revolver. Slipping on overcoat and shoes, he dropped the weapon into his pocket and set out up the railroad track. A half-mile he covered before turning into the desert.

There he wandered aimlessly for a few minutes, and after that groped his way, guarding with a stick against the surrounding threat of the cactus, for his eyes were tight closed. Still blind, he drew out the pistol, gripped it by the barrel, and threw it, whirling high and far, into the trackless waste. He passed on, feeling his uncertain way patiently.

It took him a quarter of an hour to find the railroad track and set a sure course for home, so effectually had he lost himself.... No chance of his recovering that old friend. It had been whispering to him, in the blackness of empty nights, counsels that were too persuasive.

Back in his room over the station he lighted the lamp and stood before the few books which he kept with him there; among them Io's Bible and "The Undying Voices," with the two pages still joined as her fingers had left them. He was summoning his courage to face what might be the final solution. When he must, she had said, he was to open and read. Well...he must. He could bear it no longer, the wordless uncertainty. He lifted down the volume, gently parted the fastened pages, and read. From out the still, ordered lines, there rose to him the passionate cry of protest and bereavement:

"..... Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore —
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine
And sees within my eyes the tears of two."

Over and over he read it with increasing bewilderment, with increasing fear, with slow-developing comprehension. If that was to be her farewell...but why! Io, the straightforward, the intrepid,

the exponent of fair play and the rules of the game! . . . Had it been only a game? No; at least he knew better than that.

What could it all mean? Why that medium for her message? Should he write and ask her? But what was there to ask or say, in the face of her silence? Besides, he had not even her address. Miss Camilla could doubtless give him that. But would she? How much did she understand? Why had she turned so unhelpful?

Banneker sat with his problem half through a searing night; and the other half of the night he spent in writing. But not to Io.

At noon Camilla Van Arsdale rode up to the station.

"Are you ill, Ban?" was her greeting, as soon as she saw his face.

"No, Miss Camilla. I'm going away."

She nodded, confirming not so much what he said as a fulfilled suspicion of her own. "New York is a very big city," she said.

"I haven't said that I was going to New York."

"No; there is much you haven't said."

"I haven't felt much like talking. Even to you."

"Don't go, Ban."

"I've got to. I've got to get away from here."

"And your position with the railroad?"

"I've resigned. It's all arranged." He pointed to the pile of letters, his night's work.

"What are you going to do?"

"How do I know! I beg your pardon, Miss Camilla. Write, I suppose."

"Write here."

"There's nothing to write about."

The exile, who had spent her years weaving exquisite music from the rhythm of desert winds and the overtones of the forest silence, looked about her, over the long, yellow-gray stretches pricked out with hints of brightness, to the peaceful refuge of the pines, and again to the naked and impudent meanness of the town. Across to her ears, borne on the air heavy with rain still unshed, came the rollicking, ragging jangle of the piano at the Sick Coyote.

"Aren't there people to write about there?" she said. "Tragedies and comedies and the human drama? Barrie found it in a duller place."

"Not until he had seen the world first," he retorted quickly. "And I'm not a Barrie. . . . I can't stay here, Miss Camilla."

"Poor Ban! Youth is always expecting life to fulfill itself. It doesn't."

"No; it doesn't — unless you make it."

"And how will you make it?"

"I'm going to get on a newspaper."

"It isn't so easy as all that, Ban."

"I've been writing."

In the joyous flush of energy, evoked under the spell of Io's enchantment, he had filled his spare hours with work, happy, exuberant, overflowing with a quaint vitality. A description of the desert in spate, thumb-nail sketches from a station-agent's window, queer little flavorous stories of crime and adventure and petty intrigue in the town; all done with a deftness and brevity that was saved from being too abrupt only by broad touches of color and light. And he had had a letter. He told Miss Van Arsdale of it.

"Oh, if you've a promise, or even a fair expectation of a place. But, Ban, I wouldn't go to New York, anyway."

"Why not?"

"It's no use."

His strong eyebrows went up. "Use?"

"You won't find her there."

"She's not in New York?"

"No."

"You've heard from her, then? Where is she?"

"Gone abroad."

Upon that he meditated. "She'll come back, though."

"Not to you."

He waited, silent, attentive, incredulous.

"Ban; she's married."

"Married!"

The telegraph instrument clicked in the tiny rhythm of an

elfin bass-drum. "O.S. O.S." Click. Click. Click-click-click. Mechanically responsive to his office he answered, and for a moment was concerned with some message about a local freight. When he raised his face again, Miss Van Arsdale read there a sick and floundering skepticism.

"Married!" he repeated. "Io! She couldn't."

The woman, startled by the conviction in his tone, wondered how much that might imply.

"She wrote me," said she presently.

"That she was married?"

"That she would be by the time the letter reached me."

("You will think me a fool," the girl had written impetuously, "and perhaps a cruel fool. But it is the wise thing, really. Del Eyre is so safe! He is safety itself for a girl like me. And I have discovered that I can't wholly trust myself. . . . Be gentle with him, and make him do something worth while.")

"Ah!" said Ban. "But that — "

"And I have the newspaper since with an account of the wedding . . . Ban! Don't look like that!"

"Like what?" said he stupidly.

"You look like Pretty Willie as I saw him when he was working himself up for the killing." Pretty Willie was the soft-eyed young desperado who had cleaned out the Sick Coyote.

"Oh, I'm not going to kill anybody," he said with a touch of grim amusement for her fears. "Not even myself." He rose and went to the door. "Do you mind, Miss Camilla?" he added appealingly.

"You want me to leave you now?"

He nodded. "I've got to think."

"When would you leave, Ban, if you do go?"

"I don't know."

On the following morning he went, after a night spent in arranging, destroying, and burning. The last thing to go into the stove, 67 S 4230, was a lock of hair, once glossy, but now stiffened and stained a dull brown, which he had cut from the wound on Io's head that first, strange night of theirs, the stain of her blood that had beaten in her heart, and given life to the sure,

sweet motion of her limbs, and flushed in her cheeks, and pulsed in the warm lips that she had pressed to his — Why could they not have died together on their dissolving island, with the night about them, and their last, failing sentience for each other!

The flame of the greedy stove licked up the memento, but not the memory.

"You must not worry about me," he wrote in the note left with his successor for Miss Van Arsdale. "I shall be all right. I am going to succeed."

END OF PART I

# PART II

## THE VISION

M. 3367

# PART II

## THE VISION

### CHAPTER I

MRS. BRASHEAR'S rooming-house on Grove Street wore its air of respectability like a garment, clean and somber, in an environment of careful behavior. Greenwich Village, not having fully awakened to the commercial advantages of being a *locale*, had not yet stretched between itself and the rest of New York that gauzy and iridescent curtain of sprightly impropriety and sparkling intellectual naughtiness, since faded to a rather tawdry pattern. An early pioneer of the Villager type, emancipated of thought and speech, chancing upon No. 11 Grove, would have despised it for its lack of atmosphere and its patent conservatism. It did not go out into the highways and byways, seeking prospective lodgers. It folded its hands and waited placidly for them to come. When they came, it pondered them with care, catechized them tactfully, and either rejected them with courteous finality or admitted them on probation. Had it been given to self-exploitation, it could have boasted that never had it harbored a bug or a scandal within its doors.

Now, on this filmy-soft April day it was nonplussed. A type new to its experience was applying for a room, and Mrs. Brashear, who was not only the proprietress, but, as it were, the familiar spirit and incarnation of the institution, sat peering near-sightedly and in some perturbation of soul at the phenomenon. He was young, which was against him, and of a winning directness of manner, which was in his favor, and extremely good to look at, which was potential of complications, and encased in clothing of an uncompromising cut and neutral pattern (to wit; No. 45 T 370, "an ideal style for a young business man of affairs; neat, impressive and dignified"), which was reassuring.

"My name is Banneker," he had said, immediately the door was opened to him. "Can I get a room here?"

"There is a room vacant," admitted the spirit of the house unwillingly.

"I'd like to see it."

As he spoke, he was mounting the stairs; she must, perforce, follow. On the third floor she passed him and led the way to a small, morosely papered front room, almost glaringly clean.

"All right, if I can have a work-table in it and if it isn't too much," he said, after one comprehensive glance around.

"The price is five dollars a week."

Had Banneker but known it, this was rather high. The Brashear rooming-house charged for its cleanliness, physical and moral. "Can I move in at once?" he inquired.

"I don't know you nor anything about you, Mr. Banneker," she replied, but not until they had descended the stairs and were in the cool, dim parlor. At the moment of speaking, she raised a shade, as if to help in the determination.

"Is that necessary? They didn't ask me when I registered at the hotel."

Mrs. Brashear stared, then smiled. "A hotel is different. Where are you stopping?"

"At the St. Denis."

"A very nice place. Who directed you here?"

"No one. I strolled around until I found a street I liked, and looked around until I found a house I liked. The card in the window —"

"Of course. Well, Mr. Banneker, for the protection of the house I must have references."

"References? You mean letters from people?"

"Not necessarily. Just a name or two from whom I can make inquiries. You have friends, I suppose."

"No."

"Your family —"

"I haven't any."

"Then the people in the place where you work. What is your business, by the way?"

"I expect to go on a newspaper."

"Expect?" Mrs. Brashear stiffened in defense of the institution. "You have no place yet?"

He answered not her question, but her doubt. "As far as that is concerned, I'll pay in advance."

"It isn't the financial consideration," she began loftily — "alone," she added more honestly. "But to take in a total stranger —"

Banneker leaned forward to her. "See here, Mrs. Brashear; there's nothing wrong about me. I don't get drunk. I don't smoke in bed. I'm decent of habit and I'm clean. I've got money enough to carry me. Couldn't you take me on my say-so? Look me over."

Though it was delivered with entire gravity, the speech provoked a tired and struggling smile on the landlady's plain features. She looked.

"Well?" he queried pleasantly. "What do you think? Will you take a chance?"

That suppressed motherliness which, embodying the unformulated desire to look after and care for others, turns so many widows to taking lodgers, found voice in Mrs. Brashear's reply:

"You've had a spell of sickness, haven't you?"

"No," he said, a little sharply. "Where did you get that idea?"

"Your eyes look hot."

"I haven't been sleeping very well. That's all."

"Too bad. You've had a loss, maybe," she ventured sympathetically.

"A loss? No....Yes. You might call it a loss. You'll take me, then?"

"You can move in right away," said Mrs. Brashear recklessly.

So the Brashear rooming-house took into its carefully guarded interior the young and unknown Mr. Banneker — who had not been sleeping well. Nor did he seem to be sleeping well in his new quarters, since his light was to be seen glowing out upon the quiet street until long after midnight; yet he was usually up betimes, often even before the moving spirit of the house, herself. A full

week had he been there before his fellow lodgers, self-constituted into a Committee on Membership, took his case under consideration in full session upon the front steps. None had had speech with him, but it was known that he kept irregular hours.

"What's his job: that's what I'd like to know," demanded in a tone of challenge, young Wickert, a man of the world who clerked in the decorative department of a near-by emporium.

"Newsboy, I guess," said Lambert, the belated art-student of thirty-odd with a grin. "He's always got his arms full of papers when he comes in."

"And he sits at his table clipping pieces out of them and arranging them in piles," volunteered little Mrs. Bolles, the trained nurse on the top floor. "I've seen him as I go past."

"Help-wanted ads," suggested Wickert, who had suffered experience in that will-o'-the-wisp chase.

"Then he hasn't got a job," deduced Mr. Hainer, a heavy man of heavy voice and heavy manner, middle-aged, a small-salaried accountant.

"Maybe he's got money," suggested Lambert.

"Or maybe he's a dead beat; he looks on the queer," opined young Wickert.

"He has a very fine and sensitive face. I think he has been ill." The opinion came from a thin, quietly dressed woman of the early worn-out period of life, who sat a little apart from the others. Young Wickert started a sniff, but suppressed it, for Miss Westlake was held locally in some degree of respect, as being "well-connected" and having relatives who called on her in their own limousines, though seldom.

"Anybody know his name?" asked Lambert.

"Barnacle," said young Wickert wittily. "Something like that, anyway. Bannsocker, maybe. Guess he's some sort of a Swede."

"Well, I only hope he doesn't clear out some night with his trunk on his back and leave poor Mrs. Brashear to whistle," declared Mrs. Bolles piously.

The worn face of the landlady, with its air of dispirited motherliness, appeared in the doorway. "Mr. Banneker is a *gentleman*," she said.

"Gentleman" from Mrs. Brashear, with that intonation, meant one who, out of or in a job, paid his room rent. The new lodger had earned the title by paying his month in advance. Having settled that point, she withdrew, followed by the two other women. Lambert, taking a floppy hat from the walnut rack in the hall, went his way, leaving young Wickert and Mr. Hainer to support the discussion, which they did in tones less discreet than the darkness warranted.

"Where would he hail from, would you think?" queried the elder. "Iowa, maybe? Or Ar*kan*sas?"

"Search me," answered young Wickert. "But it was a small-town carpenter built those honest-to-Gawd clothes. I'd say the corn-belt."

"Dressed up for the monthly meeting of the Farmers' Alliance, all but the oil on his hair. He forgot that," chuckled the accountant.

"He's got a fine chance in Nuh Yawk — of buying a gold brick cheap," prophesied the worldly Wickert out of the depths of his metropolitan experience. "Somebody ought to put him onto himself."

A voice from the darkened window above said, with composure, "That will be all right. I'll apply to you for advice."

"Oh, Gee!" whispered young Wickert, in appeal to his companion. "How long's he been there?"

Acute hearing, it appeared, was an attribute of the man above. for he answered at once:

"Just put my head out for a breath of air when I heard your kind expressions of solicitude. Why? Did I miss something that came earlier?"

Mr. Hainer melted unostentatiously into the darkness. While young Wickert was debating whether his pride would allow him to follow this prudent example, the subject of their over-frank discussion appeared at his elbow. Evidently he was as light of foot as he was quick of ear. Meditating briefly upon these physical qualities, young Wickert said, in a deprecatory tone:

"We didn't mean to get fresh with you. It was just talk."

"Very interesting talk."

Wickert produced a suspiciously jeweled case. "Have a cigarette?"

"I have some of my own, thank you."

"Give you a light?"

The metropolitan worldling struck a match and held it up. This was on the order of strategy. He wished to see Banneker's face. To his relief it did not look angry or even stern. Rather, it appeared thoughtful. Banneker was considering impartially the matter of his apparel.

"What is the matter with my clothes?" he asked.

"Why — well," began Wickert, unhappy and fumbling with his ideas; "Oh, *they*'re all right."

'For a meeting of the Farmers' Alliance." Banneker was smiling good-naturedly. "But for the East?"

"Well, if you really want to know," began Wickert doubtfully. "If you won't get sore —" Banneker nodded his assurance.— "Well, they're jay. No style. No snap. Respectable, and that lets 'em out."

"They don't look as if they were made in New York or for New York?"

Young Mr. Wickert apportioned his voice equitably between a laugh and a snort. "No: nor in Hoboken!" he retorted. "Listen, 'bo," he added, after a moment's thought. "You got to have a smooth shell in Nuh Yawk. The human eye only sees the surface. Get me? And it judges by the surface." He smoothed his hands down his dapper trunk with ineffable complacency. "Thirty-eight dollars, this. Bernholz Brothers, around on Broadway. Look it over. That's a cut!"

"Is that how they're making them in the East?" doubtfully asked the neophyte, reflecting that the pinched-in snugness of the coat, and the flare effect of the skirts, while unquestionably more impressive than his own box-like garb, still lacked something of the quiet distinction which he recalled in the clothes of Herbert Cressey. The thought of that willing messenger set him to groping for another sartorial name. He hardly heard Wickert say proudly:

"If Bernholz's makes 'em that way, you can bet it's up to the

split-second of date, and *maybe* they beat the pistol by a jump. I bluffed for a raise of five dollars, on the strength of this outfit, and got it off the bat. There's the suit paid for in two months and a pair of shoes over." He thrust out a leg, from below the sharp-pressed trouser-line of which protruded a boot trimmed in a sort of bizarre fretwork. "Like me to take you around to Bernholz's?"

Banneker shook his head. The name for which he sought had come to him. "Did you ever hear of Mertoun, somewhere on Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes. And I've seen Central Park and the Statue of Liberty," railed the other. "Thinkin' of patternizing Mertoun, was you?"

"Yes, I'd like to."

"Like to! There's a party at the Astorbilt's to-morrow night; you'd *like* to go to that, wouldn't you? Fat chance!" said the disdainful and seasoned cit. "D'you know what Mertoun would do to you? Set you back a hundred simoleons soon as look at you. And at that you got to have a letter of introduction like gettin' in to see the President of the United States or John D. Rockefeller. Come off, my boy! Bernholz's 'll fix you just as good, all but the label. Better come around to-morrow."

"Much obliged, but I'm not buying yet. Where would you say a fellow would have a chance to see the best-dressed men?"

Young Mr. Wickert looked at once self-conscious and a trifle miffed, for in his own set he was regarded as quite the mould of fashion. "Oh, well, if you want to pipe off the guys that *think* they're the whole thing, walk up the Avenue and watch the doors of the clubs and the swell restaurants. At that, they haven't got anything on some fellows that don't spend a quarter of the money, but know what's what and don't let grafters like Mertoun pull their legs," said he. "Say, you seem to know what you want, all right, all right," he added enviously. "You ain't goin' to let this little old town bluff you; ay?"

"No. Not for lack of a few clothes. Good-night," replied Banneker, leaving in young Wickert's mind the impression that he was "a queer gink," but also, on the whole, "a good guy." For the worldling was only small, not mean of spirit.

Banneker might have added that one who had once known cities and the hearts of men from the viewpoint of that modern incarnation of Ulysses, the hobo, contemptuous and predatory, was little likely to be overawed by the most teeming and headlong of human ant-heaps. Having joined the ant-heap, Banneker was shrewdly concerned with the problem of conforming to the best type of termite discoverable. The gibes of the doorstep chatterers had not aroused any new ambition; they had merely given point to a purpose deferred because of other and more immediate pressure. Already he had received from Camilla Van Arsdale a letter rich in suggestion, hint, and subtly indicated advice, with this one passage of frank counsel:

If I were writing, spinster-aunt-wise, to any one else in your position, I should be tempted to moralize and issue warnings about — well, about the things of the spirit. But you are equipped, there. Like the "Master," you will "go your own way with inevitable motion." With the outer man — that is different. You have never given much thought to that phase. And you have an asset in your personal appearance. I should not be telling you this if I thought there were danger of your becoming vain. But I really think it would be a good investment for you to put yourself into the hands of a first-class tailor, and follow his advice, in moderation, of course. Get the sense of being fittingly turned out by going where there are well-dressed people; to the opera, perhaps, and the theater occasionally, and, when you can afford it, to a good restaurant. Unless the world has changed, people will look at you. *But you must not know it.* Important, this is!...I could, of course, give you letters of introduction. "*Les morts vont vite*," it is true, and I am dead to that world, not wholly without the longings of a would-be *revenant;* but a ghost may still claim some privileges of memory, and my friends would be hospitable to you. Only, I strongly suspect that you would not use the letters if I gave them. You prefer to make your own start; isn't it so? Well; I have written to a few. Sooner or later you will meet with them. Those things always happen even in New York....Be sure to write me all about the job when you get it —

Prudence dictated that he should be earning something before he invested in expensive apparel, be it never so desirable and important. However, he would outfit himself just as soon as a

regular earning capacity justified his going into his carefully husbanded but dwindling savings. He pictured himself clad as a lily of the field, unconscious of perfection as Herbert Cressey himself, in the public haunts of fashion and ease; through which vision there rose the searing prospect of thus encountering Io Welland. What was her married name? He had not even asked when the news was broken to him; had not wanted to ask; was done with all that for all time.

He was still pathetically young and inexperienced. And he had been badly hurt.

## Chapter II

Dust was the conspicuous attribute of the place. It lay, flat and toneless, upon the desk, the chairs, the floor; it streaked the walls. The semi-consumptive office "boy's" middle-aged shoulders collected it. It stirred in the wake of quiet-moving men, mostly under thirty-five, who entered the outer door, passed through the waiting-room, and disappeared behind a partition. Banneker felt like shaking himself lest he should be eventually buried under its impalpable sifting. Two hours and a half had passed since he had sent in his name on a slip of paper, to Mr. Gordon, managing editor of the paper. On the way across Park Row he had all but been persuaded by a lightning printer on the curb to have a dozen tasty and elegant visiting-cards struck off, for a quarter; but some vague inhibition of good taste checked him. Now he wondered if a card would have served better.

While he waited, he checked up the actuality of a metropolitan newspaper entrance-room, as contrasted with his notion of it, derived from motion pictures. Here was none of the bustle and hurry of the screen. No brisk and earnest young figures with tense eyes and protruding notebooks darted feverishly in and out; nor, in the course of his long wait, had he seen so much as one specimen of that invariable concomitant of all screen journalism, the long-haired poet with his flowing tie and neatly ribboned manuscript. Even the office "boy," lethargic, neutrally polite, busy writing on half-sheets of paper, was profoundly untrue to the pictured type. Banneker wondered what the managing editor would be like; would almost, in the wreckage of his preconceived notions, have accepted a woman or a priest in that manifestation, when Mr. Gordon appeared and was addressed by name by the hollow-chested Cerberus. Banneker at once echoed the name, rising.

The managing editor, a tall, heavy man, whose smoothly fitting cutaway coat seemed miraculously to have escaped the plague of dust, stared at him above heavy glasses.

"You want to see me?"

"Yes. I sent in my name."

"Did you? When?"

"At two-forty-seven, thirty," replied the visitor with railroad accuracy.

The look above the lowered glasses became slightly quizzical. "You're exact, at least. Patient, too. Good qualities for a newspaper man. That's what you are?"

"What I'm going to be," amended Banneker.

"There is no opening here at present."

"That's formula, isn't it?" asked the young man, smiling.

The other stared. "It is. But how do you know?"

"It's the tone, I suppose. I've had to use it a good deal myself, in railroading."

"Observant, as well as exact and patient. Come in. I'm sorry I misplaced your card. The name is —?"

"Banneker, E. Banneker."

Following the editor, he passed through a large, low-ceilinged room, filled with desk-tables, each bearing a heavy crystal inkwell full of a fluid of particularly virulent purple. A short figure, impassive as a Mongol, sat at a corner desk, gazing out over City Hall Park with a rapt gaze. Across from him a curiously trim and graceful man, with a strong touch of the Hibernian in his elongated jaw and humorous gray eyes, clipped the early evening editions with an effect of highly judicious selection. Only one person sat in all the long files of the work-tables, littered with copy-paper and disarranged newspapers; a dark young giant with the discouraged and hurt look of a boy kept in after school. All this Banneker took in while the managing editor was disposing, usually with a single penciled word or number, of a sheaf of telegraphic "queries" left upon his desk. Having finished, he swiveled in his chair, to face Banneker, and, as he spoke, kept bouncing the thin point of a letter-opener from the knuckles of his left hand. His hands were fat and nervous.

"So you want to do newspaper work?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I think I can make a go of it."

"Any experience?"

"None to speak of. I've written a few things. I thought you might remember my name."

"Your name? Banneker? No. Why should I?"

"You published some of my things in the Sunday edition, lately. From Manzanita, California."

"No. I don't think so. Mr. Homans." A graying man with the gait of a marionnette and the precise expression of a rocking-horse, who had just entered, crossed over. "Have we sent out any checks to a Mr. Banneker recently, in California?"

The new arrival, who was copy-reader and editorial selecter for the Sunday edition, repeated the name in just such a wooden voice as was to be expected. "No," he said positively.

"But I've cashed the checks," returned Banneker, annoyed and bewildered. "And I've seen the clipping of the article in the Sunday Sphere of —"

"Just a moment. You're not in The Sphere office. Did you think you were? Some one has directed you wrong. This is The Ledger."

"Oh!" said Banneker. "It was a policeman that pointed it out. I suppose I saw wrong." He paused; then looked up ingenuously. "But, anyway, I'd rather be on The Ledger."

Mr. Gordon smiled broadly, the thin blade poised over a plump, reddened knuckle.

"Would you! Now, why?"

"I've been reading it. I like the way it does things.'

The editor laughed outright. "If you didn't look so honest, I would think that somebody of experience had been tutoring you. How many other places have you tried?"

"None."

"You were going to The Sphere first? On the promise of a job?"

"No. Because they printed what I wrote."

"The Sphere's ways are not our ways," pronounced Mr. Gordon primly. "It's a fundamental difference in standards."

"I can see that."

"Oh, you can, can you?" chuckled the other. "But it's true that we have no opening here."

(The Ledger never did have an "opening"; but it managed to wedge in a goodly number of neophytes, from year to year, ninety per cent of whom were automatically and courteously ejected after due trial. Mr. Gordon performed a surpassing rataplan upon his long-suffering thumb-joint and wondered if this queer and direct being might qualify among the redeemable ten per cent.)

"I can wait." (They often said that.) "For a while," added the youth thoughtfully.

"How long have you been in New York?"

"Thirty-three days."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Reading newspapers."

"No! Reading — That's rather surprising. All of them?"

"All that I could manage."

"Some were so bad that you couldn't worry through them, eh?" asked the other with appreciation.

"Not that. But I didn't know the foreign languages except French, and Spanish, and a little Italian."

"The foreign-language press, too. Remarkable!" murmured the other. "Do you mind telling me what your idea was?"

"It was simple enough. As I wanted to get on a newspaper, I thought I ought to find out what newspapers were made of."

"Simple, as you say. Beautifully simple! So you've devised for yourself the little job of perfecting yourself in every department of journalism; politics, finances, criminal, sports, society; all of them, eh?"

"No; not all," replied Banneker.

"Not? What have you left out?"

"Society news" was the answer, delivered less promptly than the other replies.

Bestowing a twinkle of mingled amusement and conjecture upon the applicant's clothing, Mr. Gordon said:

"You don't approve of our social records? Or you're not interested? Or why is it that you neglect this popular branch?"

"Personal reasons."

This reply, which took the managing editor somewhat aback, was accurate if not explanatory. Miss Van Arsdale's commentaries upon Gardner and his quest had inspired Banneker with a contemptuous distaste for this type of journalism. But chiefly he had shunned the society columns from dread of finding there some mention of her who had been Io Welland. He was resolved to conquer and evict that memory; he would not consciously put himself in the way of anything that recalled it.

"Hum! And this notion of making an intensive study of the papers; was that original with you?"

"Well, no, not entirely. I got it from a man who made himself a bank president in seven years."

"Yes? How did he do that?"

"He started by reading everything he could find about money and coinage and stocks and bonds and other financial paper. He told me that it was incredible the things that financial experts didn't know about their own business — the deep-down things — and that he guessed it was so with any business. He got on top by really knowing the things that everybody was supposed to know."

"A sound theory, I dare say. Most financiers aren't so revealing."

"He and I were padding the hoof together. We were both hoboes then."

The managing editor looked up, alert, from his knuckle-tapping. "From bank president to hobo. Was his bank an important one?"

"The biggest in a medium-sized city."

"And does that suggest nothing to you, as a prospective newspaper man?"

"What? Write him up?"

"It would make a fairly sensational story."

"I couldn't do that. He was my friend. He wouldn't like it."

Mr. Gordon addressed his wedding-ring finger which was looking a bit scarified. "Such an article as that, properly done, would go a long way toward getting you a chance on this paper— Sit down, Mr. Banneker."

"You and I," said Banneker slowly and in the manner of the West, "can't deal."

"Yes, we can." The managing editor threw his steel blade on the desk. "Sit down, I tell you. And understand this. If you come on this paper — I'm going to turn you over to Mr. Greenough, the city editor, with a request that he give you a trial — you'll be expected to subordinate every personal interest and advantage to the interests and advantages of the paper, *except* your sense of honor and fair-play. We don't ask you to give that up; and if you do give it up, we don't want you at all. What have you done besides be a hobo?"

"Railroading. Station-agent."

"Where were you educated?"

"Nowhere. Wherever I could pick it up."

"Which means everywhere. Ever read George Borrow?"

"Yes."

The heavy face of Mr. Gordon lighted up. "Ree-markable! Keep on. He's a good offset to — to the daily papers. Writing still counts, on The Ledger. Come over and meet Mr. Greenough."

The city editor unobtrusively studied Banneker out of placid, inscrutable eyes, soft as a dove's, while he chatted at large about theaters, politics, the news of the day. Afterward the applicant met the Celtic assistant, Mr. Mallory, who broadly outlined for him the technique of the office. With no further preliminaries Banneker found himself employed at fifteen dollars a week, with Monday for his day off and directions to report on the first of the month.

As the day-desk staff was about departing at six o'clock, Mr. Gordon sauntered over to the city desk looking mildly apologetic.

"I practically had to take that young desert antelope on," said he.

"Too ingenuous to turn down," surmised the city editor.

"Ingenuous! He's heir to the wisdom of the ages. And now I'm afraid I've made a ghastly mistake."

"Something wrong with him?"

"I've had his stuff in the Sunday Sphere looked up."

"Pretty weird?" put in Mallory, gliding into his beautifully fitting overcoat.

"So damned good that I don't see how The Sphere ever came to take it. Greenough, you'll have to find some pretext for firing that young phenomenon as soon as possible."

Perfectly comprehending his supe ior's mode of indirect expression the city editor replied:

"You think so highly of him as that?"

"Not one of our jobs will be safe from him if he once gets his foot planted," prophesied the other with mock ruefulness. "Do you know," he added, "I never even asked him for a reference."

"You don't need to," pronounced Mallory, shaking the last wrinkle out of himself and lighting the cigarette of departure. "He's got it in his face, if I'm any judge."

Highly elate, Banneker walked on springy pavements all the way to Grove Street. Fifteen a week! He could live on that. His other income and savings could be devoted to carrying out Miss Camilla's advice. For he need not save any more. He would go ahead, fast, now that he had got his start. How easy it had been.

Entering the Brashear door, he met plain, middle-aged little Miss Westlake. A muffler was pressed to her jaw. He recalled having heard her moving about her room, the cheapest and least desirable in the house, and groaning softly late in the night; also having heard some lodgers say that she was a typist with very little work. Obviously she needed a dentist, and presumably she had not the money to pay his fee. In the exultation of his good luck, Banneker felt a stir of helpfulness toward this helpless person.

"Oh!" said he. "How do you do! Could you find time to do some typing for me quite soon?"

It was said impulsively and was followed by a surge of dismay. Typing? Type what? He had absolutely nothing on hand!

Well, he must get up something. At once. It would never do to disappoint that pathetic and eager hope, as of a last-moment rescue, expressed in the little spinster's quick flush and breathless, thankful affirmative.

## Chapter III

Ten days' leeway before entering upon the new work. To which of scores of crowding purposes could Banneker best put the time? In his offhand way the instructive Mallory had suggested that he familiarize himself with the topography and travel-routes of the Island of Manhattan. Indefatigably he set about doing this; wandering from water-front to water-front, invading tenements, eating at queer, Englishless restaurants, picking up chance acquaintance with chauffeurs, peddlers, street-fakers, park-bench loiterers; all that drifting and iridescent scum of life which variegates the surface above the depths. Everywhere he was accepted without question, for his old experience on the hoof had given him the uncoded password which loosens the speech of furtive men and wise. A receptivity, sensitized to a high degree by the inspiration of new adventure, absorbed these impressions. The faithful pocket-ledger was filling rapidly with notes and phrases, brisk and trenchant, set down with no specific purpose; almost mechanically, in fact, but destined to future uses. Mallory, himself no mean connoisseur of the tumultuous and flagrant city, would perhaps have found matter foreign to his expert apprehension could he have seen and translated the pages of 3 T 9901.

Banneker would go forward in the fascinating paths of exploration; but there were other considerations.

The outer man, for example. The inner man, too; the conscious inner man strengthened upon the strong milk of the philosophers, the priests, and the prophets so strangely mingled in that library now stored with Camilla Van Arsdale; exhilarated by the honey-dew of "The Undying Voices," of Keats and Shelley, and of Swinburne's supernal rhythms, which he had brought with him. One visit to the Public Library had quite appalled him; the vast, chill orderliness of it. He had gone there, hungry to chat about books! To the Public Library! Surely a Homeric joke for grim, tomish officialdom. But tomish officialdom had not even laughed at him; it was too official to appreciate the quality of such side-splitting innocence.... Was

he likely to meet a like irresponsiveness when he should seek clothing for the body?

Watch the clubs, young Wickert had advised. Banneker strolled up Fifth Avenue, branching off here and there, into the more promising side streets.

It was the hour of the First Thirst; the institutions which cater to this and subsequent thirsts drew steadily from the main stream of human activity flowing past. Many gloriously clad specimens passed in and out of the portals, socially sacred as in the quiet Fifth Avenue clubs, profane as in the roaring, taxi-bordered "athletic" foundations; but there seemed to the anxious observer no keynote, no homogeneous character wherefrom to build as on a sure foundation. Lacking knowledge, his instinct could find no starting-point; he was bewildered in vision and in mind. Just off the corner of the quietest of the Forties, he met a group of four young men, walking compactly by twos. The one nearest him in the second line was Herbert Cressey. His heavy and rather dull eye seemed to meet Banneker's as they came abreast. Banneker nodded, half checking himself in his slow walk.

"How are you?" he said with an accent of surprise and pleasure.

Cressey's expressionless face turned a little. There was no response in kind to Banneker's smile.

"Oh! H'ware you!" said he vaguely, and passed on.

Banneker advanced mechanically until he reached the corner. There he stopped. His color had heightened. The smile was still on his lips; it had altered, taken on a quality of gameness. He did not shake his fist at the embodied spirit of metropolitanism before him, as had a famous Gallic precursor of his, also a determined seeker for Success in a lesser sphere; but he paraphrased Rastignac's threat in his own terms.

"I reckon I'll have to lick this town and lick it good before it learns to be friendly."

A hand fell on his arm. He turned to face Cressey.

"You're the feller that bossed the wreck out there in the desert, aren't you? You're — lessee — Banneker."

"I am." The tone was curt.

"Awfully sorry I didn't spot you at once." Cressey's genuineness was a sufficient apology. "I'm a little stuffy to-day. Bachelor dinner last night. What are you doing here? Looking around?"

"No. I'm living here."

"That so? So am I. Come into my club and let's talk. I'm glad to see you, Mr. Banneker."

Even had Banneker been prone to self-consciousness, which he was not, the extreme, almost monastic plainness of the small, neutral-fronted building to which the other led him would have set him at ease. It gave no inkling of its unique exclusiveness, and equally unique expensiveness. As for Cressey, that simple, direct, and confident soul took not the smallest account of Banneker's standardized clothing, which made him almost as conspicuous in that environment as if he had entered clad in a wooden packing-case. Cressey's creed in such matters was complete; any friend of his was good enough for any environment to which he might introduce him, and any other friend who took exceptions might go farther!

"Banzai!" said the cheerful host over his cocktail. "Welcome to our city. Hope you like it."

"I do," said Banneker, lifting his glass in response.

"Where are you living?"

"Grove Street."

Cressey knit his brows. "Where's that? Harlem?"

"No. Over west of Sixth Avenue."

"Queer kind of place to live, ain't it? There's a corkin' little suite vacant over at the Regalton. Cheap at the money. Oh!-er-I-er-maybe —"

"Yes; that's it," smiled Banneker. "The treasury isn't up to bachelor suites, yet awhile. I've only just got a job."

"What is it?"

"Newspaper work. The Morning Ledger."

"Reporting?" A dubious expression clouded the candid cheerfulness of the other's face.

"Yes. What's the matter with that?"

"Oh; I dunno. It's a piffling sort of job, ain't it?"

"Piffling? How do you mean?"

"Well, I supposed you had to ask a lot of questions and pry into other people's business and — and all that sorta thing."

"If nobody asked questions," pointed out Banneker, remembering Gardner's resolute devotion to his professional ideals, "there wouldn't be any news, would there?"

"Sure! That's right," agreed the gilded youth. "The Ledger's the decentest paper in town, too. It's a gentleman's paper. I know a feller on it; Guy Mallory; was in my class at college. Give you a letter to him if you like."

Informed that Banneker already knew Mr. Mallory, his host expressed the hope of being useful to him in any other possible manner — "any tips I can give you or anything of that sort, old chap?"— so heartily that the newcomer broached the subject of clothes.

"Nothin' easier," was the ready response. "I'll take you right down to Mertoun. Just one more and we're off."

The one more having been disposed of: "What is it you want?" inquired Cressey, when they were settled in the taxi which was waiting at the club door for them.

"Well, what *do* I want? You tell me."

"How far do you want to go? Will five hundred be too much?"

"No."

Cressey lost himself in mental calculations out of which he presently delivered himself to this effect:

"Evening clothes, of course. And a dinner-jacket suit. Two business suits, a light and a dark. You won't need a morning coat, I expect, for a while. Anyway, we've got to save somethin' out for shirts and boots, haven't we?"

"I haven't the money with me" remarked Banneker, his innocent mind on the cash-with-order policy of Sears-Roebuck.

"Now, see here," said Cressey, good-humoredly, yet with an effect of authority. "This is a game that's got to be played according to the rules. Why, if you put down spot cash before Mertoun's eyes he'd faint from surprise, and when he came to,

he'd have no respect for you. And a tailor's respect for you," continued Cressey, the sage, "shows in your togs."

"When do I pay, then?"

"Oh, in three or four months he sends around a bill. That's more of a reminder to come in and order your fall outfit than it is anything else. But you can send him a check on account, if you feel like it."

"A check?" repeated the neophyte blankly. "Must I have a bank account?"

"Safer than a sock, my boy. And just as simple. To-morrow will do for that, when we call on the shirtmakers and the shoe sharps. I'll put you in my bank; they'll take you on for five hundred."

Arrived at Mertoun's, Banneker unobtrusively but positively developed a taste of his own in the matter of hue and pattern; one, too, which commanded Cressey's respect. The gilded youth's judgment tended toward the more pronounced herring-bones and homespuns.

"All right for you, who can change seven days in the week; but I've got to live with these clothes, day in and day out," argued Banneker.

To which Cressey deferred, though with a sigh. "You could carry off those sporty things as if they were woven to order for you," he declared. "You've got the figure, the carriage, the — the whatever-the-devil it is, for it."

Prospectively poorer by something more than four hundred dollars, Banneker emerged from Mertoun's with his mentor.

"Gotta get home and dress for a rotten dinner," announced that gentleman cheerfully. "Duck in here with me," he invited, indicating a sumptuous bar, near the tailor's, "and get another little kick in the stomach. No? Oh, verrawell. Where are you for?"

"The Public Library."

"Gawd!" said his companion, honestly shocked. "That's a gloomy hole, ain't it?"

"Not so bad, when you get used to it. I've been putting in three hours a day there lately."

"Whatever for?"

"Oh, browsing. Book-hungry, I suppose. Carnegie hasn't discovered Manzanita yet, you know; so I haven't had many library opportunities."

"Speaking of Manzanita," remarked Cressey, and spoke of it, reminiscently and at length, as they walked along together. "Did the lovely and mysterious I. O. W. ever turn up and report herself?"

Banneker's breath caught painfully in his throat.

"D'you know who she was?" pursued the other, without pause for reply to his previous question; and still without intermission continued: "Io Welland. *That*'s who she was. Oh, but she's a hummer! I've met her since. Married, you know. Quick work, that marriage. There was a dam' queer story whispered around about her starting to elope with some other chap, and his going nearly batty because she didn't turn up, and all the time she was wandering around in the desert until somebody picked her up and took care of her. You ought to know something of that. It was supposed to be right in your back-yard."

"I?" said Banneker, commanding himself with an effort; "Miss Welland reported in with a slight injury. That's all."

One glance at him told Cressey that Banneker did indeed "know something" of the mysterious disappearance which had so exercised a legion of busy tongues in New York; how much that something might be, he preserved for future and private speculation, based on the astounding perception that Banneker was in real pain of soul. Tact inspired Cressey to say at once:

"Of course, that's all you had to consider. By the way, you haven't seen my revered uncle since you got here, have you?"

"Mr. Vanney? No."

"Better drop in on him."

"He might try to give me another yellow-back," smiled the ex-agent.

"Don't take Uncle Van for a fool. Once is plenty for him to be hit on the nose."

"Has he still got a green whisker?"

"Go and see. He's asked about you two or three times in the last coupla months."

"But I've no errand with him."

"How can you tell? He might start something for you. It isn't often that he keeps a man in mind like he has you. Anyway, he's a wise old bird and may hand you a pointer or two about what's what in New York. Shall I 'phone him you're in town?"

"Yes. I'll get in to see him some time to-morrow."

Having made an appointment, in the vital matter of shirts and shoes, for the morning, they parted. Banneker set to his browsing in the library until hunger drove him forth. After dinner he returned to his room, cumbered with the accumulation of evening papers, for study.

Beyond the thin partition he could hear Miss Westlake moving about and humming happily to herself. The sound struck dismay to his soul. The prospect of work from him was doubtless the insecure foundation of that cheerfulness. "Soon" he had said; the implication was that the matter was pressing. Probably she was counting on it for the morrow. Well, he must furnish something, anything, to feed the maw of her hungry typewriter; to fulfill that wistful hope which had sprung in her eyes when he spoke to her.

Sweeping his table bare of the lore and lure of journalism as typified in the bulky, black-faced editions, he set out clean paper, cleansed his fountain pen, and stared at the ceiling. What should he write about? His mental retina teemed with impressions. But they were confused, unresolved, distorted for all that he knew, since he lacked experience and knowledge of the environment, and therefore perspective. Groping, he recalled a saying of Gardner's as that wearied enthusiast descanted upon the glories of past great names in metropolitan journalism.

"They used to say of Julian Ralph that he was always discovering City Hall Park and getting excited over it; and when he got excited enough, he wrote about it so that the public just ate it up."

Well, he, Banneker, hadn't discovered City Hall Park; not consciously. But he had gleaned wonder and delight from other and more remote spots, and now one of them began to stand forth upon the blank ceiling at which he stared, seeking guidance. A crowded corner of Essex Street, stewing in the hard sunshine.

The teeming, shrill crowd. The stench and gleam of a fish-stall offering bargains. The eager games of the children, snatched between onsets of imminent peril as cart or truck came whirling through and scattering the players. Finally the episode of the trade fracas over the remains of a small and dubious weakfish, terminating when the dissatisfied customer cast the delicacy at the head of the stall-man and missed him, the *corpus delicti* falling into the gutter where it was at once appropriated and rapt away by an incredulous, delighted, and mangy cat. A crude, commonplace, malodorous little street row, the sort of thing that happens, in varying phases, on a dozen East-Side corners seven days in the week.

Banneker approached and treated the matter from the viewpoint of the cat, predatory, philosophic, ecstatic. One o'clock in the morning saw the final revision, for he had become enthralled with the handling of his subject. It was only a scant five pages; less than a thousand words. But as he wrote and rewrote, other schemata rose to the surface of his consciousness, and he made brief notes of them on random ends of paper; half a dozen of them, one crowding upon another. Some day, perhaps, when there were enough of them, when he had become known, had achieved the distinction of a signature like Gardner, there might be a real series....His vague expectancies were dimmed in weariness.

Such was the genesis of the "Local Vagrancies" which later were to set Park Row speculating upon the signature "Eban."

## Chapter IV

Accessibility was one of Mr. Horace Vanney's fads. He aspired to be a publicist, while sharing fallible humanity's ignorance of just what the vague and imposing term signifies; and, as a publicist, he conceived it in character to be readily available to the public. Almost anybody could get to see Mr. Vanney in his tasteful and dignified lower Broadway offices, upon almost any reasonable or plausible errand. Especially was he hospitable to the newspaper world, the agents of publicity; and, such is the ingratitude of the fallen soul of man, every newspaper office in the city fully comprehended his attitude, made use of him as convenient, and professionally regarded him as a bit of a joke, albeit a useful and amiable joke. Of this he had no inkling. Enough for him that he was frequently, even habitually quoted, upon a wide range of windy topics, often with his picture appended.

With far less difficulty than he had found in winning the notice of Mr. Gordon, Banneker attained the sanctum of the capitalist.

"Well, well!" was the important man's greeting as he shook hands. "Our young friend from the desert! How do we find New York?"

From Banneker's reply, there grew out a pleasantly purposeless conversation, which afforded the newcomer opportunity to decide that he did not like this Mr. Vanney, sleek, smiling, gentle, and courteous, as well as he had the brusque old tyrant of the wreck. That green-whiskered autocrat had been at least natural, direct, and unselfish in his grim emergency work. This manifestation seemed wary, cautious, on its guard to defend itself against some probable tax upon its good nature. All this unconscious, instinctive reckoning of the other man's characteristics gave to the young fellow an effect of poise, of judicious balance and quiet confidence. It was one of Banneker's elements of strength, which subsequently won for him his unique place, that he was always too much interested in estimating the man to whom he was talking, to consider even what the other might think of him.

It was at once a form of egoism, and the total negation of egotism. It made him the least self-conscious of human beings. And old Horace Vanney, pompous, vain, the most self-conscious of his genus, felt, though he could not analyze, the charm of it.

A chance word indicated that Banneker was already "placed." At once, though almost insensibly, the attitude of Mr. Vanney eased; obviously there was no fear of his being "boned" for a job. At the same time he experienced a mild misgiving lest he might be forfeiting the services of one who could be really useful to him. Banneker's energy and decisiveness at the wreck had made a definite impression upon him. But there was the matter of the rejected hundred-dollar tip. Unpliant, evidently, this young fellow. Probably it was just as well that he should be broken in to life and new standards elsewhere than in the Vanney interests. Later, if he developed, watchfulness might show it to be worth while to...

"What is it that you have in mind, my boy?" inquired the benign Mr. Vanney.

"I start in on The Ledger next month."

"The Ledger! Indeed! I did not know that you had any journalistic experience."

"I haven't."

"Well. Er — hum! Journalism, eh? A — er — brilliant profession!"

"You think well of it?"

"I have many friends among the journalists. Fine fellows! Very fine fellows."

The instinctive tone of patronage was not lost upon Banneker. He felt annoyed at Mr. Vanney. Unreasonably annoyed. "What's the matter with journalism?" he asked bluntly.

"The matter?" Mr. Vanney was blandly surprised. "Have n't I just said —"

"Yes; you have. Would you let your son go into a newspaper office?"

"My son? My son chose the profession of law."

"But if he had wanted to be a journalist?"

"Journalism does not perhaps offer the same opportunities

for personal advancement as some other lines," said the financier cautiously.

"Why shouldn't it?"

"It is largely anonymous." Mr. Vanney gave the impression of feeling carefully for his words. "One may go far in journalism and yet be comparatively unknown to the public. Still, he might be of great usefulness," added the sage, brightening, "very great usefulness. A sound, conservative, self-respecting newspaper such as The Ledger, is a public benefactor."

"And the editor of it?"

"That's right, my boy," approved the other. "Aim high! Aim high! The great prizes in journalism are few. They are, in any line of endeavor. And the apprenticeship is hard."

Herbert Cressey's clumsy but involuntary protest reasserted itself in Banneker's mind. "I wish you would tell me frankly, Mr. Vanney, whether reporting is considered undignified and that sort of thing?"

"Reporters can be a nuisance," replied Mr. Vanney fervently. "But they can also be very useful."

'But on the whole — "

"On the whole it is a necessary apprenticeship. Very suitable for a young man. Not a final career, in my judgment."

"A reporter on The Ledger, then, is nothing but a reporter on The Ledger."

"Isn't that enough, for a start?" smiled the other. "The station-agent at — what was the name of your station? Yes, Manzanita. The station-agent at Manzanita —"

"Was E. Banneker," interposed the owner of that name positively. "A small puddle, but the inhabitant was an individual toad, at least. To keep one's individuality in New York isn't so easy, of course."

"There are quite a number of people in New York," pointed out the philosopher, Vanney. "Mostly crowd."

"Yes," said Banneker. "You've told me something about the newspaper business that I wanted to know." He rose.

The other put out an arresting hand. "Wouldn't you like to do a little reporting for me, before you take up your regular work?"

"What kind of reporting?"

"Quite simple. A manufacturing concern in which I own a considerable interest has a strike on its hands. Suppose you go down to Sippiac, New Jersey, where our factories are, spend three or four days, and report back to me your impressions and any ideas you may gather as to improving our organization for furthering our interests."

"What makes you think that I could be useful in that line?" asked Banneker curiously.

"My observations at the Manzanita wreck. You have, I believe, a knack for handling a situation."

"I can always try," accepted Banneker.

Supplied with letters to the officials of the International Cloth Company, and a liberal sum for expenses, the neophyte went to Sippiac. There he visited the strongly guarded mills, still making a feeble pretense of operating, talked with the harassed officials, the gang-boss of the strike-breakers, the "private guards," who had, in fact, practically assumed dominant police authority in the place; all of which was faithful to the programme arranged by Mr. Vanney. Having done so much, he undertook to obtain a view of the strike from the other side; visited the wretched tenements of the laborers, sought out the sullen and distrustful strike-leaders, heard much fiery oratory and some veiled threats from impassioned agitators, mostly foreign and all tragically earnest; chatted with corner grocerymen, saloon-keepers, ward politicians, composing his mental picture of a strike in a minor city, absolutely controlled, industrially, politically, and socially by the industry which had made it. The town, as he came to conceive it, was a fevered and struggling gnome, bound to a wheel which ground for others; a gnome who, if he broke his bonds, would be perhaps only the worse for his freedom. At the beginning of the sixth day, for his stay had outgrown its original plan, the pocket-ledger, 3 T 9901, was but little the richer, but the mind of its owner teemed with impressions.

It was his purpose to take those impressions in person to Mr. Horace Vanney, by the 10 A.M. train. Arriving at the station early, he was surprised at being held up momentarily by a line

of guards engaged in blocking off a mob of wailing, jabbering women, many of whom had children in their arms, or at their skirts. He asked the ticket-agent, a big, pasty young man about them.

"Mill workers," said the agent, making change.

"What are they after?"

"Wanta get to the 10.10 train."

"And the guards are stopping them?"

"You can use your eyes, cantcha?"

Using his eyes, Banneker considered the position. "Are those fellows on railroad property?"

"What is it to you whether they are or ain't?"

Banneker explained his former occupation. "That's different," said the agent. "Come inside. That's a hell of a mess, ain't it!" he added plaintively as Banneker complied. "Some of those poor Hunkies have got their tickets and can't use 'em."

"I'd see that they got their train, if this was my station," asserted Banneker.

"Yes, you would! With that gang of strong-arms against you."

"Chase 'em," advised Banneker simply. "They've got no right keeping your passengers off your trains."

"Chase 'em, ay? You'd do it, I suppose."

"I would."

"How?"

"You've got a gun, haven't you?"

"Maybe you think those guys haven't got guns, too."

"Well, all I can say is, that if there had been passengers held up from their trains at my station and I didn't get them through, *I'd* have been through so far as the Atkinson & St. Philip goes."

"This railroad's different. I'd be through if I butted in on this mill row."

"How's that?"

"Well, for one thing, old Vanney, who's the real boss here, is a director of the road."

"So *that*'s it!" Banneker digested this information. "Why are the women so anxious to get away?"

"They say"— the local agent lowered his voice —"their children are starving here, and they can get better jobs in other places. Naturally the mills don't want to lose a lot of their hands, particularly the women, because they're the cheapest. I don't know as I blame 'em for that. But this business of hiring a bunch of ex-cons and — Hey! Where are you goin'?"

Banneker was beyond the door before the query was completed. Looking out of the window, the agent saw a fat and fussy young mother, who had contrived to get through the line, waddling at her best speed across the open toward the station, and dragging a small boy by the hand. A lank giant from the guards' ranks was after her. Screaming, she turned the corner out of his vision. There were sounds which suggested a row at the station-door, but the agent, called at that moment to the wire, could not investigate. The train came and went, and he saw nothing more of the ex-railroader from the West.

Although Mr. Horace Vanney smiled pleasantly enough when Banneker presented himself at the office to make his report, the nature of the smile suggested a background more uncertain.

"Well, what have you found, my boy?" the financier began.

"A good many things that ought to be changed," answered Banneker bluntly.

"Quite probably. No institution is perfect."

"The mills are pretty rotten. You pay your people too little—"

"Where do you get that idea?"

"From the way they live."

"My dear boy; if we paid them twice as much, they'd live the same way. The surplus would go to the saloons."

"Then why not wipe out the saloons?"

"I am not the Common Council of Sippiac," returned Mr. Vanney dryly.

"Aren't you?" retorted Banneker even more dryly.

The other frowned. "What else?"

"Well; the housing. You own a good many of the tenements, don't you?"

"The company owns some."

"They're filthy holes."

"They are what the tenants make them."

"The tenants didn't build them with lightless hallways, did they?"

"They needn't live there if they don't like them. Have you spent all your time, for which I am paying, nosing about like a cheap magazine muckraker?" It was clear that Mr. Vanney was annoyed.

"I've been trying to find out what is wrong with Sippiac. I thought you wanted facts."

"Precisely. Facts. Not sentimental gushings."

"Well, there are your guards. There isn't much sentiment about them. I saw one of them smash a woman in the face, and knock her down, while she was trying to catch a train and get out of town."

"And what did you do?"

"I don't know exactly how much. But I hope enough to land him in the hospital. They pulled me off too soon."

"Do you know that you would have been killed if it hadn't been for some of the factory staff who saved you from the other guards — as you deserved, for your foolhardiness?"

The young man's eyebrows went up a bit. "Don't bank too much on my foolhardiness. I had a wall back of me. And there would have been material for several funerals before they got me." He touched his hip-pocket. "By the way, you seem to be well informed."

"I've been in 'phone communication with Sippiac since the regrettable occurrence. It perhaps didn't occur to you to find out that the woman, who is now under arrest, bit the guard very severely."

"Of course! Just like the rabbit bit the bulldog. You've got a lot of thugs and strong-arm men doing your dirty work, that ought to be in jail. If the newspapers here ever get onto the situation, it would make pretty rough reading for you, Mr. Vanney."

The magnate looked at him with contemptuous amusement. "No newspaper of decent standing prints that kind of socialistic stuff, my young friend."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Because of my position. Because the International Cloth Company is a powerful institution of the most reputable standing, with many lines of influence."

"And that is enough to keep the newspapers from printing an article about conditions in Sippiac?" asked Banneker, deeply interested in this phase of the question. "Is that the fact?"

It was not the fact; The Sphere, for one, would have handled the strike on the basis of news interest, as Mr. Vanney well knew; wherefore he hated and pretended to despise The Sphere. But for his own purposes he answered:

"Not a paper in New York would touch it. Except," he added negligently, "perhaps some lying, Socialist sheet. And let me warn you, Mr. Banneker," he pursued in his suavest tone, "that you will find no place for your peculiar ideas on The Ledger. In fact, I doubt whether you will be doing well either by them or by yourself in going on their staff, holding such views as you do."

"Do you? Then I'll tell them beforehand."

Mr. Vanney privately reflected that there was no need of this: *he* intended to call up the editor-in-chief and suggest the unsuitability of the candidate for a place, however humble, on the staff of a highly respectable and suitably respectful daily.

Which he did. The message was passed on to Mr. Gordon, and, in his large and tolerant soul, decently interred. One thing of which the managing editor of The Ledger was not tolerant was interference from without in his department.

Before allowing his man to leave, Mr. Vanney read him a long and well-meant homily, full of warning and wisdom, and was both annoyed and disheartened when, at the end of it, Banneker remarked:

"I'll dare you to take a car and spend twenty-four hours going about Sippiac with me. If you stand for your system after that, I'll pay for the car."

To which the other replied sadly that Banneker had in some manner acquired a false and distorted view of industrial relations.

Therein, for once in an existence guided almost exclusively by

prejudice, Horace Vanney was right. At the outset of a new career to which he was attuning his mind, Banneker had been injected into a situation typical of all that is worst in American industrial life, a local manufacturing enterprise grown rich upon the labor of underpaid foreigners, through the practice of all the vicious, lawless, and insidious methods of an ingrown autocracy, and had believed it to be fairly representative. Had not Horace Vanney, doubtless genuine in his belief, told him as much?

"We're as fair and careful with our employees as any of our competitors."

As a matter of fact there were, even then, scores of manufacturing plants within easy distance of New York, representing broad and generous policies and conducted on a progressive and humanistic labor system. Had Banneker had his first insight into local industrial conditions through one of these, he might readily have been prejudiced in favor of capital. As it was, swallowing Vanney's statement as true, he mistook an evil example as a fair indication of the general status. Then and there he became a zealous protagonist of labor.

It had been Mr. Horace Vanney's shrewd design to show a budding journalist of promise on which side his self-interest lay. The weak spot in the plan was that Banneker did not seem to care!

## Chapter V

Banneker's induction into journalism was unimpressive. They gave him a desk, an outfit of writing materials, a mail-box with his name on it, and eventually an assignment. Mr. Mallory presented him to several of the other "cubs" and two or three of the older and more important reporters. They were all quite amiable, obviously willing to be helpful, and they impressed the observant neophyte with that quiet and solid *esprit de corps* which is based upon respect for work well performed in a common cause. He apprehended that The Ledger office was in some sort an institution.

None of his new acquaintances volunteered information as to the mechanism of his new job. Apparently he was expected to figure that out for himself. By nature reticent, and trained in an environment which still retained enough of frontier etiquette to make a scrupulous incuriosity the touchstone of good manners and perhaps the essence of self-preservation, Banneker asked no questions. He sat and waited.

One by one the other reporters were summoned by name to the city desk, and dispatched with a few brief words upon the various items of the news. Presently Banneker found himself alone, in the long files of desks. For an hour he sat there and for a second hour. It seemed a curious way in which to be earning fifteen dollars a week. He wondered whether he was expected to sit tight at his desk. Or had he the freedom of the office? Characteristically choosing the more active assumption, he found his way to the current newspaper files. They were like old friends.

"Mr. Banneker." An office boy was at his elbow. "Mr. Greenough wants you."

Conscious of a quickened pulse, and annoyed at himself because of it, the tyro advanced to receive his maiden assignment. The epochal event was embodied in the form of a small clipping from an evening paper, stating that a six-year-old boy had been fatally burned at a bonfire near the North River. Banneker, Mr.

Greenough instructed him mildly, was to make inquiries of the police, of the boy's family, of the hospital, and of such witnesses as he could find.

Quick with interest he caught up his hat and hurried out. Death, in the sparsely populated country wherefrom he hailed, was a matter of inclusive local importance; he assumed the same of New York. Three intense hours he devoted to an item which any police reporter of six months' standing would have rounded up in a brace of formal inquiries, and hastened back, brimful of details for Mr. Greenough.

"Good! Good!" interpolated that blandly approving gentleman from time to time in the course of the narrative. "Write it, Mr. Banneker! write it."

"How much shall I write?"

"Just what is necessary to tell the news."

Behind the amiable smile which broadened without lighting up the sub-Mongol physiognomy of the city editor, Banneker suspected something. As he sat writing page after page, conscientiously setting forth every germane fact, the recollection of that speculative, estimating smile began to play over the sentences with a dire and blighting beam. Three fourths of the way through, the writer rose, went to the file-board and ran through a dozen newspapers. He was seeking a ratio, a perspective. He wished to determine how much, in a news sense, the death of the son of an obscure East-Side plasterer was worth. On his return he tore up all that he had written, and substituted a curt paragraph, without character or color, which he turned in. He had gauged the value of the tragedy accurately, in the light of his study of news files.

Greenough showed the paragraph (which failed to appear at all in the overcrowded paper of next morning) to Mr. Gordon.

"The new man doesn't start well," he remarked. "Too little imaginative interest."

"Isn't it knowledge rather than lack of interest?" suggested the managing editor.

"It may come to the same thing. If he knows too much to get really interested, he'll be a dull reporter."

"I doubt whether you'll find him dull," smiled Mr. Gordon. "But he may find his job dull. In that case, of course he'd better find another."

Indeed, that was the danger which, for weeks to follow, Banneker skirted. Police news, petty and formal, made up his day's work. Had he sought beneath the surface of it the underlying elements, and striven to express these, his matter as it came to the desk, however slight the technical news value might have been, would have afforded the watchful copy-readers, trained to that special selectiveness as only The Ledger could train its men, opportunity of judging what potentialities might lurk beneath the crudities of the "cub." But Banneker was not crude. He was careful. His sense of the relative importance of news, acquired by those weeks of intensive analysis before applying for his job, was too just to let him give free play to his pen. What was the use? The "story" wasn't worth the space.

Nevertheless, 3 T 9901, which Banneker was already too cognoscent to employ in his formal newsgathering (the notebook is anathema to the metropolitan reporter), was filling up with odd bits, which were being transferred, in the weary hours when the new man sat at his desk with nothing to do, to paper in the form of sketches for Miss Westlake's trustful and waiting typewriter. Nobody could say that Banneker was not industrious. Among his fellow reporters he soon acquired the melancholy reputation of one who was forever writing "special stuff," none of which ever "landed." It was chiefly because of his industry and reliability, rather than any fulfillment of the earlier promise of brilliant worth as shown in the Sunday Sphere articles, that he got his first raise to twenty dollars. It surprised rather than gratified him.

He went to Mr. Gordon about it. The managing editor was the kind of man with whom it is easy to talk straight talk.

"What's the matter with me?" asked Banneker.

Mr. Gordon played a thoughtful tattoo upon his fleshy knuckles with the letter-opener. "Nothing. Aren't you satisfied?"

"No. Are you?"

"You've had your raise, and fairly early. Unless you had been worth it, you wouldn't have had it."

"Am I doing what you expected of me?"

"Not exactly. But you're developing into a sure, reliable reporter."

"A routine man," commented Banneker.

"After all, the routine man is the backbone of the office." Mr. Gordon executed a fantasia on his thumb. "Would you care to try a desk job?" he asked, peering at Banneker over his glasses.

"I'd rather run a trolley car. There's more life in it."

"Do you *see* life, in your work, Mr. Banneker?"

"See it? I feel it. Sometimes I think it's going to flatten me out like a steam-roller."

"Then why not write it?"

"It isn't news: not what I see."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps it's something else. But if it's there and we can get a gleam of it into the paper, we'll crowd news out to make a place for it. You haven't been reading The Ledger I'm afraid."

"Like a Bible."

"Not to good purpose, then. What do you think of Tommy Burt's stuff?"

"It's funny; some of it. But I couldn't do it to save my job."

"Nobody can do it but Burt, himself. Possibly you could learn something from it, though."

"Burt doesn't like it, himself. He told me it was all formula; that you could always get a laugh out of people about something they'd been taught to consider funny, like a red nose or a smashed hat. He's got a list of Sign Posts on the Road to Humor."

"The cynicism of twenty-eight," smiled the tolerant Mr. Gordon. "Don't let yourself be inoculated."

"Mr. Gordon," said Banneker doggedly; "I'm not doing the kind of work I expected to do here."

"You can hardly expect the star jobs until you've made yourself a star man."

Banneker flushed. "I'm not complaining of the way I've been

treated. I've had a square enough deal. The trouble is with me. I want to know whether I ought to stick or quit."

"If you quit, what would you do?"

"I haven't a notion," replied the other with an indifference which testified to a superb, instinctive self-confidence. "Something."

"Do it here. I think you'll come along all right."

"But what's wrong with me?" persisted Banneker.

"Too much restraint. A rare fault. You haven't let yourself out." For a space he drummed and mused. Suddenly a knuckle cracked loudly. Mr. Gordon flinched and glared at it, startled as if it had offended him by interrupting a train of thought. "Here!" said he brusquely. "There's a Sewer-Cleaners' Association picnic to-morrow. They're going to put in half their day inspecting the Stimson Tunnel under the North River. Pretty idea; isn't it? Suppose I ask Mr. Greenough to send you out on the story. And I'd like a look at it when you turn it in."

Banneker worked hard on his report of the picnic; hard and self-consciously. Tommy Burt would, he knew, have made a "scream" of it, for tired business men to chuckle over on their way downtown. Pursuant to what he believed Mr. Gordon wanted, Banneker strove conscientiously to be funny with these human moles, who, having twelve hours of freedom for sunshine and air, elected to spend half of it in a hole bigger, deeper, and more oppressive than any to which their noisome job called them. The result was five painfully mangled sheets which presently went to the floor, torn in strips. After that Banneker reported the picnic as he saw, felt, and smelt it. It was a somber bit of writing, not without its subtleties and shrewd perceptions; quite unsuitable to the columns of The Ledger, in which it failed to appear. But Mr. Gordon read it twice. He advised Banneker not to be discouraged.

Banneker was deeply discouraged. He wanted to resign.

Perhaps he would have resigned, if old Mynderse Verschoyle had not died at eight o'clock on the morning of the day when Banneker was the earliest man to report at the office. A picturesque character, old Mynderse, who had lived for forty-five

years with his childless wife in the ancient house on West 10th Street, and for the final fifteen years had not addressed so much as a word to her. She had died three months before; and now he had followed, apparently, from what Banneker learned in an interview with the upset and therefore voluble secretary of the dead man, because, having no hatred left on which to center his life, he had nothing else to live for. Banneker wrote the story of that hatred, rigid, ceremonious, cherished like a rare virtue until it filled two lives; and he threw about it the atmosphere of the drear and divided old house. At the end, the sound of the laughter of children at play in the street.

The article appeared word for word as he had written it. That noon Tommy Burt, the funny man, drawing down his hundred-plus a week on space, came over and sat on Banneker's desk, and swung his legs and looked at him mournfully and said:

"You've broken through your shell at last."

"Did you like it?" asked Banneker.

"Like it! My God, if I could write like that! But what's the use! Never in the world."

"Oh, that's nonsense," returned Banneker, pleased. "Of course you can. But what's the rest of your 'if'?"

"I wouldn't be wasting my time here. The magazines for me."

"Is that better?"

"Depends on what you're after. For a man who wants to write, it's better, of course."

"Why?"

"Gives him a larger audience. No newspaper story is remembered overnight except by newspaper men. And they don't matter."

"Why don't they matter?" Banneker was surprised again, this time rather disagreeably.

"It's a little world. There isn't much substance to it. Take that Verschoyle stuff of yours; that's literature, that is! But you'll never hear of it again after next week. A few people here will remember it, and it'll help you to your next raise. But after you've got that, and, after that, your lift onto space, where are you?"

The abruptly confidential approach of Tommy Burt flattered Banneker with the sense that by that one achievement of the Verschoyle story he had attained a new status in the office. Later there came out from the inner sanctum where sat the Big Chief, distilling venom and wit in equal parts for the editorial page, a special word of approval. But this pleased the recipient less than the praise of his peers in the city room.

After that first talk, Burt came back to Banneker's desk from time to time, and once took him to dinner at "Katie's," the little German restaurant around the corner. Burt was given over to a restless and inoffensively egoistic pessimism.

"Look at me. I'm twenty-eight and making a good income. When I was twenty-three, I was making nearly as much. When I'm thirty-eight, where shall I be?"

"Can't you keep on making it?" asked Banneker.

"Doubtful. A fellow goes stale on the kind of stuff I do. And if I do keep on? Five to six thousand is fine now. It won't be so much ten years from now. That's the hell of this game; there's no real chance in it."

"What about the editing jobs?"

"Desk-work? Chain yourself by the leg, with a blue pencil in your hand to butcher better men's stuff? A managing editor, now, I'll grant you. He gets his twenty or twenty-five thousand if he doesn't die of overstrain, first. But there's only a few managing editors."

"There are more editorial writers."

"Hired pens. Dishing up other fellows' policies, whether you believe in 'em or not. No; I'm not of that profession, anyway." He specified the profession, a highly ancient and dishonorable one. Mr. Burt, in his gray moods, was neither discriminating nor quite just.

Banneker voiced the question which, at some point in his progress, every thoughtful follower of journalism must meet and solve as best he can. "When a man goes on a newspaper I suppose he more or less accepts that paper's standards, doesn't he?"

"More or less? To what extent?" countered the expert.

"I haven't figured that out, yet."

"Don't be in a hurry about it," advised the other with a gleam of malice. "The fellows that do figure it out to the end, and are honest enough about it, usually quit."

"You haven't quit."

"Perhaps I'm not honest enough or perhaps I'm too cowardly," retorted the gloomy Burt.

Banneker smiled. Though the other was nearly two years his senior, he felt immeasurably the elder. There is about the true reporter type an infinitely youthful quality; attractive and touching; the eternal juvenile, which, being once outgrown with its facile and evanescent enthusiasms, leaves the expert declining into the hack. Beside this prematurely weary example of a swift and precarious success, Banneker was mature of character and standard. Nevertheless, the seasoned journalist was steeped in knowledge which the tyro craved.

"What would you do," Banneker asked, "if you were sent out to write a story absolutely opposed to something you believed right; political, for instance?"

"I don't write politics. That's a specialty."

"Who does?"

"'Parson' Gale."

"Does he believe in everything The Ledger stands for?"

"Certainly. In office hours. For and in consideration of one hundred and twenty-five dollars weekly, duly and regularly paid."

"Outside of office hours, then."

"Ah; that's different. In Harlem where he lives, the Parson is quite a figure among the reform Democrats. The Ledger, as you know, is Republican; and anything in the way of reform is its favorite butt. So Gale spends his working day poking fun at his political friends and associates."

"Out West we'd call that kind of fellow a yellow pup."

"Well, don't call the Parson that; not to me," warned the other indignantly. "He's as square a man as you'll find on Park Row. Why, you were just saying, yourself, that a reporter is bound to accept his paper's standards when he takes the job."

"Then I suppose the answer is that a man ought to work only on a newspaper in whose policies he believes."

"Which policies? A newspaper has a hundred different ones about a hundred different things. Here in this office we're dead against the split infinitive and the Honest Laboring Man. We don't believe he's honest and we've got our grave doubts as to his laboring. Yet one of our editorial writers is an out-and-out Socialist and makes fiery speeches advising the proletariat to rise and grab the reins of government. But he'd rather split his own head than an infinitive."

"Does he write anti-labor editorials?" asked the bewildered Banneker.

"Not as bad as that. He confines himself to European politics and popular scientific matters. But, of course, wherever there is necessity for an expression of opinion, he's anti-socialist in his writing, as he's bound to be."

"Just a moment ago you were talking of hired pens. Now you seem to be defending that sort of thing. I don't understand your point of view."

"Don't you? Neither do I, I guess," admitted the expositor with great candor. "I can argue it either way and convince myself, so far as the other fellow's work is concerned. But not for my own."

"How do you figure it out for yourself, then?"

"I don't. I dodge. It's a kind of tacit arrangement between the desk and me. In minor matters I go with the paper. That's easy, because I agree with it in most questions of taste and the way of doing things. After all The Ledger *has* got certain standards of professional conduct and of decent manners; it's a gentleman's paper. The other things, the things where my beliefs conflict with the paper's standards, political or ethical, don't come my way. You see, I'm a specialist; I do mostly the fluffy stuff."

"If that's the way to keep out of embarrassing decisions, I'd like to become a specialist myself."

"You can do it, all right," the other assured him earnestly. "That story of yours shows it. You've got The Ledger touch — no, it's more individual than that. But you've got something that's going to stick out even here. Just the same, there'll come a time when you'll have to face the other issue of your job or your — well, your conscience."

What Tommy Burt did not say in continuation, and had no need to say, since his expressive and ingenuous face said it for him, was, "And I wonder what you'll do with *that!*"

A far more influential friend than Tommy Burt had been wondering, too, and had, not without difficulty, expressed her doubts in writing. Camilla Van Arsdale had written to Banneker:

> . . .I know so little of journalism, but there are things about it that I distrust instinctively. Do you remember what that wrangler from the *Jon Cal* told Old Bill Speed when Bill wanted to hire him: "I wouldn't take any job that I couldn't look in the eye and tell it to go to hell on five minutes' notice." I have a notion that you've got to take that attitude toward a reporting job. There must be so much that a man cannot do without loss of self-respect. Yet, I can't imagine why I should worry about you as to that. Unless it is that, in a strange environment one gets one's values confused. . . .Have you had to do any "Society" reporting yet? I hope not. The society reporters of my day were either obsequious little flunkeys and parasites, or women of good connections but no money who capitalized their acquaintanceship to make a poor living, and whom one was sorry for, but would rather not see. Going to places where one is not asked, scavenging for bits of news from butlers and housekeepers, sniffing after scandals — perhaps that is part of the necessary apprenticeship of newspaper work. But it's not a proper work for a gentleman. And, in any case, Ban, you are that, by the grace of your ancestral gods.

Little enough did Banneker care for his ancestral gods: but he did greatly care for the maintenance of those standards which seemed to have grown, indigenously within him, since he had never consciously formulated them. As for reporting, of whatever kind, he deemed Miss Van Arsdale prejudiced. Furthermore, he had met the society reporter of The Ledger, an elderly, mild, inoffensive man, neat and industrious, and discerned in him no stigma of the lickspittle. Nevertheless, he hoped that he would not be assigned to such "society news" as Remington did not cover in his routine. It might, he conceived, lead him into false situations where he could be painfully snubbed. And he had never yet been in a position where any one could snub him without instant reprisals. In such circumstances he did not know exactly what he would do. However, that bridge could be crossed or refused when he came to it.

## Chapter VI

Such members of the Brashear household as chose to accommodate themselves strictly to the hour could have eight o'clock breakfast in the basement dining-room for the modest consideration of thirty cents; thirty-five with special cream-jug. At these gatherings, usually attended by half a dozen of the lodgers, matters of local interest were weightily discussed; such as the progress of the subway excavations, the establishment of a new Italian restaurant in 11th Street, or the calling away of the fourth-floor-rear by the death of an uncle who would perhaps leave him money. To this sedate assemblage descended one crisp December morning young Wickert, clad in the natty outline of a new Bernholz suit, and obviously swollen with tidings.

"Whaddya know about the latest?" he flung forth upon the coffee-scented air.

"The latest" in young Wickert's compendium of speech might be the garments adorning his trim person, the current song-hit of a vaudeville to which he had recently contributed his critical attention, or some tidbit of purely local gossip. Hainer, the plump and elderly accountant, opined that Wickert had received an augmentation of salary, and got an austere frown for his sally. Evidently Wickert deemed his news to be of special import; he was quite bloated, conversationally. He now dallied with it.

"Since when have you been taking in disguised millionaires, Mrs. Brashear?"

The presiding genius of the house, divided between professional resentment at even so remotely slurring an implication (for was not the Grove Street house good enough for any millionaire, undisguised!) and human curiosity, requested an explanation.

"I was in Sherry's restaurant last night," said the offhand Wickert.

"I didn't read about any fire there," said the jocose Hainer, pointing his sally with a wink at Lambert, the art-student.

Wickert ignored the gibe. Such was the greatness of his tidings that he could afford to.

"Our firm was giving a banquet to some buyers and big folks in the trade. Private room upstairs; music, flowers, champagne by the case. We do things in style when we do 'em. They sent me up after hours with an important message to our Mr. Webler; he was in charge of arrangements."

"Been promoted to be messenger, ay?" put in Mr. Hainer, chuckling.

"When I came downstairs," continued the other with only a venomous glance toward the seat of the scorner, "I thought to myself what's the matter with taking a look at the swells feeding in the big restaurant. You may not know it, people, but Sherry's is the ree-churchiest place in Nuh Yawk to eat dinner. It's got 'em all beat. So I stopped at the door and took 'em in. Swell? Oh, you dolls! I stood there trying to work up the nerve to go in and siddown and order a plate of stew or something that wouldn't stick me more'n a dollar, just to *say* I'd been dining at Sherry's, when I looked across the room, and whadda you think?" He paused, leaned forward, and shot out the climactic word, "Banneker!"

"Having his dinner there?" asked the incredulous but fascinated Mrs. Brashear.

"Like he owned the place. Table to himself, against the wall. Waiter fussin' over him like he loved him. And dressed! Oh, Gee!"

"Did you speak to him?" asked Lambert

"He spoke to me," answered Wickert, dealing in subtle distinctions. "He was just finishing his coffee when I sighted him. Gave the waiter haffa dollar. I could see it on the plate. There I was at the door, and he said, 'Why, hello, Wickert. Come and have a liquor.' He pronounced it a queer, Frenchy way. So I said thanks, I'd have a highball."

"Didn't he seem surprised to see you there?" asked Hainer.

Wickert paid an unconscious tribute to good-breeding. "Banneker's the kind of feller that wouldn't show it if he was surprised. He couldn't have been as surprised as I was, at that.

We went to the bar and had a drink, and then I ast him what'd *he* have on *me*, and all the time I was sizing him up. *I*'m telling you, he looked like he'd grown up in Sherry's."

The rest of the conversation, it appeared from Mr. Wickert's spirited sketch, had consisted mainly in eager queries from himself, and good-humored replies by the other.

Did Banneker eat there every night?

Oh, no! He wasn't up to that much of a strain on his finances.

But the waiters seemed to know him, as if he was one of the regulars.

In a sense he was. Every Monday he dined there. Monday was his day off.

Well, Mr. Wickert (awed and groping) *would* be damned! All alone?

Banneker, smiling, admitted the solitude. He rather liked dining alone.

Oh, Wickert couldn't see that at all! Give him a pal and a coupla lively girls, say from the Ladies' Tailor-Made Department, good-lookers and real dressers; that was *his* idea of a dinner, though he'd never tried it at Sherry's. Not that he couldn't if he felt like it.... How much did they stick you for a good feed-out with a cocktail and maybe a bottle of Italian Red?

Well, of course, that depended... which way was Wickert going? Could Banneker set him on his way? He was taking a taxi to the Avon Theater, where there was an opening.

Did Mr. Banneker (Wickert had by this time attained the "Mr." stage) always follow up his dinner at Sherry's with a theater?

Usually, if there were an opening. If not he went to the opera or a concert.

For his part, Wickert liked a little more spice in life. Still, every feller to his tastes. And Mr. Banneker was sure dressed for the part. Say — if he didn't mind — who made that full-dress suit?

No; of course he didn't mind. Mertoun made it.

After which Mr. Banneker had been deftly enshrouded in a fur-lined coat, worthy of a bank president, had crowned these glories with an impeccable silk hat, and had set forth. Wickert

had only to add that he wore in his coat lapel one of those fancy tuberoses, which he, Wickert, had gone to the pains of pricing at the nearest flower shop immediately after leaving Banneker. A dollar apiece! No, he had not accepted the offer of a lift, being doubtful upon the point of honor as to whether he would be expected to pay a *pro rata* of the taxi charge. They, the assembled breakfast company, had his permission to call him, Mr. Wickert, a goat if Mr. Banneker wasn't the swellest-looking guy he had anywhere seen on that memorable evening.

Nobody called Mr. Wickert a goat. But Mr. Hainer sniffed and said:

"And him a twenty-five-dollar-a-week reporter!"

"Perhaps he has private means," suggested little Miss Westlake, who had her own reasons for suspecting this: reasons bolstered by many and frequent manuscripts, turned over to her for typing, recast, returned for retyping, and again, in many instances, re-recast and re-retyped, the result of the sweating process being advantageous to their literary quality. Simultaneous advantage had accrued to the typist, also, in a practical way. Though the total of her bills was modest, it constituted an important extra; and Miss Westlake no longer sought to find solace for her woes through the prescription of the ambulant school of philosophic thought, and to solve her dental difficulties by walking the floor of nights. Philosophy never yet cured a toothache. Happily the sufferer was now able to pay a dentist. Hence Banneker could work, untroubled of her painful footsteps in the adjoining room, and considered the outcome cheap at the price. He deemed himself an exponent of enlightened selfishness. Perhaps he was. But the dim and worn spinster would have given half a dozen of her best and painless teeth to be of service to him. Now she came to his defense with a pretty dignity:

"I am sure that Mr. Banneker would not be out of place in any company."

"Maybe not," answered the cynical Lambert. "But where does he get it? I ask you!"

"Wherever he gets it, no gentleman could be more forehanded in his obligations," declared Mrs. Brashear.

"But what's he want to blow it for in a shirty place like Sherry's?" marveled young Wickert.

"Wyncha ask him?" brutally demanded Hainer.

Wickert examined his mind hastily, and was fain to admit inwardly that he had wanted to ask him, but somehow felt "skittish" about it. Outwardly he retorted, being displeased at his own weakness, "Ask him yourself."

Had any one questioned the subject of the discussion at Mrs. Brashear's on this point, even if he were willing to reply to impertinent interrogations (a high improbability of which even the hardy Wickert seems to have had some timely premonition), he would perhaps have explained the glorified routine of his day-off, by saying that he went to Sherry's and the opening nights for the same reason that he prowled about the water-front and ate in polyglot restaurants on obscure street-corners east of Tompkins Square; to observe men and women and the manner of their lives. It would not have been a sufficient answer; Banneker must have admitted that to himself. Too much a man of the world in many strata not to be adjustable to any of them, nevertheless he felt more attuned to and at one with his environment amidst the suave formalism of Sherry's than in the more uneasy and precarious elegancies of an East-Side Tammany Association promenade and ball.

Some of the youngsters of The Ledger said that he was climbing.

He was not climbing. To climb one must be conscious of an ascent to be surmounted. Banneker was serenely unaware of anything above him, in that sense. Eminent psychiatrists were, about that time, working upon the beginning of a theory of the soul, later to be imposed upon an impressionable and faddish world, which dealt with a profound psychical deficit known as a "complex of inferiority." In Banneker they would have found sterile soil. He had no complex of inferiority, nor, for that matter, of superiority; mental attitudes which, applied to social status, breed respectively the toady and the snob. He had no complex at all. He had, or would have had, if the soul-analysts had invented such a thing, a simplex. Relative status was a matter to

which he gave little thought. He maintained personal standards not because of what others might think of him, but because he chose to think well of himself.

Sherry's and a fifth-row-center seat at opening nights meant to him something more than refreshment and amusement; they were an assertion of his right to certain things, a right of which, whether others recognized or ignored it, he felt absolutely assured. These were the readily attainable places where successful people resorted. Serenely determined upon success, he felt himself in place amidst the outward and visible symbols of it. Let the price be high for his modest means; this was an investment which he could not afford to defer. He was but anticipating his position a little, and in such wise that nobody could take exception to it, because his self-promotion demanded no aid or favor from any other living person. His interest was in the environment, not in the people, as such, who were hardly more than "walking ladies and gentlemen" in a *mise-en-scène*. Indeed, where minor opportunities offered by chance of making acquaintances, he coolly rejected them. Banneker did not desire to know people — yet. When he should arrive at the point of knowing them, it must be upon his terms, not theirs.

It was on one of his Monday evenings of splendor that a misadventure of the sort which he had long foreboded, befell him. Sherry's was crowded, and a few tables away Banneker caught sight of Herbert Cressey, dining with a mixed party of a dozen. Presently Cressey came over.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" he asked, shaking hands. "Haven't seen you for months."

"Working," replied Banneker. "Sit down and have a cocktail. Two, Jules," he added to the attentive waiter.

"I guess they can spare me for five minutes," agreed Cressey, glancing back at his forsaken place. "This isn't what you call work, though, is it?"

"Hardly. This is my day off."

"Oh! And how goes the job?"

"Well enough."

"I'd think so," commented the other, taking in the general

effect of Banneker's easy habituation to the standards of the restaurant. "You don't own this place, do you?" he added.

From another member of the world which had inherited or captured Sherry's as part of the spoils of life, the question might have been offensive. But Banneker genuinely liked Cressey.

"Not exactly," he returned lightly. "Do I give that unfortunate impression?"

"You give very much the impression of owning old Jules — or he does — and having a proprietary share in the new head waiter. Are you here much?"

"Monday evenings, only."

"This is a good cocktail," observed Cressey, savoring it expertly. "Better than they serve to me. And, say, Banneker, did Mertoun make you that outfit?"

"Yes."

"Then I quit him," declared the gilded youth.

"Why? Isn't it all right?"

"All right! Dammit, it's a better job than ever I got out of him," returned his companion indignantly. "Some change from the catalogue suit you sported when you landed here! You know how to wear 'em; I've got to say that for you.... I've got to get back. When'll you dine with me? I want to hear all about it."

'Any Monday," answered Banneker.

Cressey returned to his waiting potage, and was immediately bombarded with queries, mainly from the girl on his left.

"Who's the wonderful-looking foreigner?"

"He isn't a foreigner. At least not very much."

"He looks like a North Italian princeling I used to know," said one of the women. "One of that warm-complexioned out-of-door type, that preserves the Roman mould. Isn't he an Italian?"

"He's an American. I ran across him out in the desert country."

"Hence that burned-in brown. What was he doing out there?"

Cressey hesitated. Innocent of any taint of snobbery himself, he yet did not know whether Banneker would care to have his humble position tacked onto the tails of that work of art, his new

coat. "He was in the railroad business," he returned cautiously. "His name is Banneker."

"I've been seeing him for months," remarked another of the company. "He's always alone and always at that table. Nobody knows him. He's a mystery."

"He's a beauty," said Cressey's left-hand neighbor.

Miss Esther Forbes had been quite openly staring, with her large, gray, and childlike eyes, at Banneker, eating his oysters in peaceful unconsciousness of being made a subject for discussion. Miss Forbes was a Greuze portrait come to life and adjusted to the extremes of fashion. Behind an expression of the sweetest candor and wistfulness, as behind a safe bulwark, she preserved an effrontery which balked at no defiance of conventions in public, though essentially she was quite sufficiently discreet for self-preservation. Also she had a keen little brain, a reckless but good-humored heart and a memory retentive of important trifles.

"In the West, Bertie?" she inquired of Cressey. "You were in that big wreck there, weren't you?"

"Devil of a wreck," said Cressey uneasily. You never could tell what Esther might know or might not say.

"Ask him over here," directed that oung lady blandly, or coffee and liqueurs."

"Oh, I say!" protested one of the men. "Nobody knows anything about him —"

"He's a friend of mine," put in Cressey, in a tone which ended that particular objection. "But I don't think he'd come."

Instantly there was a chorus of demand for him.

"All right, I'll try," yielded Cressey, rising.

"Put him next to me," directed Miss Forbes.

The emissary visited Banneker's table, was observed to be in brief colloquy with him, and returned, alone.

"Wouldn't he come?" interrogated the chorus.

"He's awfully sorry, but he says he isn't fit for decent human associations."

"More and more interesting!"— "Why?"—"What awful thing has he been doing?"

"Eating onions," answered Cressey. "Raw."

"I don' believe it," cried the indignant Miss Forbes. "One doesn't eat raw onions at Sherry's. It's a subterfuge."

"Very likely."

"If I went over there myself, who'll bet a dozen silk stockings that I can't —"

"Come off it, Ess," protested her brother-in-law across the table. "That's too high a jump, even for you."

She let herself be dissuaded, but her dovelike eyes were vagrant during the rest of the dinner.

Pleasantly musing over the last glass of a good but moderate-priced Rosemont-Geneste, Banneker became aware of Cressey's dinner party filing past him: then of Jules, the waiter, discreetly murmuring something, from across the table. A faint and provocative scent came to his nostrils, and as he followed Jules's eyes he saw a feminine figure standing at his elbow. He rose promptly and looked down into a face which might have been modeled for a type of appealing innocence.

"You're Mr. Banneker, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I'm Esther Forbes, and I think I've heard a great deal about you."

"It doesn't seem probable," he replied gravely.

"From a cousin of mine," pursued the girl. "She was Io Welland. Haven't I?"

A shock went through Banneker at the mention of the name. But he steadied himself to say: "I don't think so."

Herein he was speaking by the letter. Knowing Io Welland as he had, he deemed it very improbable that she had even so much as mentioned him to any of her friends. In that measure, at least, he believed, she would have respected the memory of the romance which she had so ruthlessly blasted. This girl, with the daring and wistful eyes, was simply fishing, so he guessed.

His guess was correct. Mendacity was not outside of Miss Forbes's easy code when enlisted in a good cause, such as appeasing her own impish curiosity. Never had Io so much as mentioned that quaint and lively romance with which vague

gossip had credited her, after her return from the West; Esther Forbes had gathered it in, gossamer thread by gossamer thread, and was now hoping to identify Banneker in its uncertain pattern. Her little plan of startling him into some betrayal had proven abortive. Not by so much as the quiver of a muscle or the minutest shifting of an eye had he given sign. Still convinced that he was the mysterious knight of the desert, she was moved to admiration for his self-command and to a sub-thrill of pleasurable fear as before an unknown and formidable species. The man who had transformed self-controlled and invincible Io Welland into the creature of moods and nerves and revulsions which she had been for the fortnight preceding her marriage, must be something out of the ordinary. Instinct of womankind told Miss Forbes that this and no other was the type of man to work such a miracle.

"But you did know Io?" she persisted, feeling, as she afterward confessed, that she was putting her head into the mouth of a lion concerning whose habits her knowledge was regrettably insufficient.

The lion did not bite her head off. He did not even roar. He merely said, "Yes."

"In a railroad wreck or something of that sort?"

"Something of that sort."

"Are you awfully bored and wishing I'd go away and let you alone?" she said, on a note that pleaded for forbearance. "Because if you are, don't make such heroic efforts to conceal it."

At this an almost imperceptible twist at the corners of his lips manifested itself to the watchful eye and cheered the enterprising soul of Miss Forbes. "No," he said equably, "I'm interested to discover how far you'll go."

The snub left Miss Forbes unembarrassed.

"Oh, as far as you'll let me," she answered. "Did you ride in from your ranch and drag Io out of the tangled wreckage at the end of your lasso?"

"My ranch? I wasn't on a ranch."

"Please, sir," she smiled up at him like a beseeching angel,

"what did you do that kept us all talking and speculating about you for a whole week, though we didn't know your name?"

"I sat right on my job as station-agent at Manzanita and made up lists of the killed and injured," answered Banneker dryly.

"Station-agent!" The girl was taken aback, for this was not at all in consonance with the Io myth as it had drifted back, from sources never determined, to New York. "Were you the station-agent?"

"I was."

She bestowed a glance at once appraising and flattering, less upon himself than upon his apparel. "And what are you now? President of the road?"

"A reporter on The Ledger."

"Really!" This seemed to astonish her even more than the previous information. "What are you reporting here?"

"I'm off duty to-night."

"I see. Could you get off duty some afternoon and come to tea, if I'll promise to have Io there to meet you?"

"Your party seems to be making signals of distress, Miss Forbes."

"That's the normal attitude of my friends and family toward me. You'll come, won't you, Mr. Banneker?"

"Thank you: but reporting keeps one rather too busy for amusement."

"You won't come," she murmured, aggrieved. "Then it *is* true about you and Io."

This time she achieved a result. Banneker flushed angrily, though he said, coolly enough: "I think perhaps you would make an enterprising reporter, yourself, Miss Forbes."

"I'm sure I should. Well, I'll apologize. And if you won't come for Io — she's still abroad, by the way and won't be back for a month — perhaps you'll come for me. Just to show that you forgive my impertinences. Everybody does. I'm going to tell Bertie Cressey he must bring you....All right, Bertie! I wish you wouldn't follow me up like — like a paper-chase. Good-night, Mr. Banneker."

To her indignant escort she declared that it couldn't have hurt

them to wait a jiffy; that she had had a most amusing conversation; that Mr. Banneker was as charming as he was good to look at; and that (in answer to sundry questions) she had found out little or nothing, though she hoped for better results in future.

"But he's Io's passion-in-the-desert right enough," said the irreverent Miss Forbes.

Banneker sat long over his cooling coffee. Through haunted nights he had fought maddening memories of Io's shadowed eyes, of the exhalant, irresistible femininity of her, of the pulses of her heart against his on that wild and wonderful night in the flood; and he had won to an armed peace, in which the outposts of his spirit were ever on guard against the recurrent thoughts of her.

Now, at the bitter music of her name on the lips of a gossiping and frivolous girl, the barriers had given away. In eagerness and self-contempt he surrendered to the vision. Go to an afternoon tea to see and speak with her again? He would, in that awakened mood, have walked across the continent, only to be in her presence, to feel himself once more within the radius of that inexorable charm.

## Chapter VII

"Katie's" sits, sedate and serviceable, on a narrow side street so near to Park Row that the big table in the rear rattles its dishes when the presses begin their seismic rumblings, in the daily effort to shake the world. Here gather the pick and choice of New York journalism, while still on duty, to eat and drink and discuss the inner news of things which is so often much more significant than the published version; haply to win or lose a few swiftly earned dollars at pass-three hearts. It is the unofficial press club of Newspaper Row.

Said McHale of The Sphere, who, having been stuck with the queen of spades — that most unlucky thirteener — twice in succession, was retiring on his losses, to Mallory of The Ledger who had just come in:

"I hear you've got a sucking genius at your shop."

"If you mean Banneker, he's weaned," replied the assistant city editor of The Ledger. "He goes on space next week."

"Does he, though! Quick work, eh?"

"A record for the office. He's been on the staff less than a year."

"Is he really such a wonder?" asked Glidden of The Monitor.

Three or four Ledger men answered at once, citing various stories which had stirred the interest of Park Row.

"Oh, you Ledger fellows are always giving the college yell for each other," said McHale, impatiently voicing the local jealousy of The Ledger's recognized *esprit de corps*. "I've seen bigger rockets than him come down in the ash-heap."

"He won't," prophesied Tommy Burt, The Ledger's humorous specialist. "He'll go up and stay up. High! He's got the stuff."

"They say," observed Fowler, the star man of The Patriot, "he covers his assignment in taxicabs."

"He gets the news," murmured Mallory, summing up in that phrase all the encomiums which go to the perfect praise of the natural-born reporter.

"And he writes it," put in Van Cleve of The Courier. "Lord, how that boy can write! Why, a Banneker two-sticks stands out as if it were printed in black-face."

"I've never seen him around," remarked Glidden. "What does he do with himself besides work?"

"Nothing, I imagine," answered Mallory. "One of the cubs reports finding him at the Public Library, before ten o'clock in the morning, surrounded by books on journalism. He's a serious young owl."

"It doesn't get into his copy, then," asserted "Parson" Gale, political expert for The Ledger.

"Nor into his appearance. He certainly dresses like a flower of the field. Even the wrinkles in his clothes have the touch of high-priced Fifth Avenue."

"Must be rich," surmised Fowler. "Taxis for assignments and Fifth-Avenue raiment sound like real money."

"Nobody knows where he got it, then," said Tommy Burt. "Used to be a freight brakeman or something out in the wild-and-woolly. When he arrived, he was dressed very proud and stiff like a Baptist elder going to make a social call, all but the made-up bow tie and the oil on the hair. Some change and sudden!"

"Got a touch of the swelled head, though, hasn't he?" asked Van Cleve. "I hear he's beginning to pick his assignments already. Refuses to take society stuff and that sort of thing."

"Oh," said Mallory, "I suppose that comes from his being assigned to a tea given by the Thatcher Forbes for some foreign celebrity, and asking to be let off because he'd already been invited there and declined."

"Hello!" exclaimed McHale. "Where does our young bird come in to fly as high as the Thatcher Forbes? He may look like a million dollars, but is he?"

"All I know," said Tommy Burt, "is that every Monday, which is his day off, he dines at Sherry's, and goes in lonely glory to a first-night, if there is one, afterward. It must have been costing him half of his week's salary."

"Swelled head, sure," diagnosed Decker, the financial reporter

of The Ledger. "Well, watch the great Chinese joss, Greenough, pull the props from under him when the time comes."

"As how?" inquired Glidden.

"By handing him a nawsty one out of the assignment book, just to show him where his hat fits too tight."

"A run of four-line obits," suggested Van Cleve, who had passed a painful apprenticeship of death-notices in which is neither profitable space nor hopeful opportunity, "for a few days, will do it."

"Or the job of asking an indignant millionaire papa why his pet daughter ran away with the second footman and where."

"Or interviewing old frozen-faced Willis Enderby on his political intentions, honorable or dishonorable."

"If I know Banneker," said Mallory, "he's game. He'll take what's handed him and put it over."

"Once, maybe," contributed Tommy Burt. "Twice, perhaps. But I wouldn't want to crowd too much on him."

"Greenough won't. He's wise in the ways of marvelous and unlicked cubs," said Decker.

"Why? What do you think Banneker would do?" asked Mallory curiously, addressing Burt.

"If he got an assignment too rich for his stomach? Well, speaking unofficially and without special knowledge, I'd guess that he'd handle it to a finish, and then take his very smart and up-to-date hat and perform a polite adieu to Mr. Greenough and all the works of The Ledger city room."

A thin, gray, somnolent elder at the end of the table, whose nobly cut face was seared with lines of physical pain endured and outlived, withdrew a very small pipe from his mouth and grunted.

"The Venerable Russell Edmonds has the floor," said Tommy Burt in a voice whose open raillery subtly suggested an underlying affection and respect. "He snorts, and in that snort is sublimated the wisdom and experience of a ripe ninety years on Park Row. Speak, O Compendium of all the —"

"Shut up, Tommy," interrupted Edmonds. He resumed his pipe, gave it two anxious puffs, and, satisfied of its continued vitality, said:

"Banneker, uh? Resign, uh? You think he would?"

"I think so."

"Does *he* think so?"

"That's my belief."

"He won't," pronounced the veteran with finality. "They never do. They chafe. They strain. They curse out the job and themselves. They say it isn't fit for any white man. So it isn't, the worst of it. But they stick. If they're marked for it, they stick."

"Marked for it?" murmured Glidden.

"The ink-spot. The mark of the beast. I've got it. You've got it, Glidden, and you, McHale. Mallory's smudged with it. Tommy thinks it's all over him, but it isn't. He'll end between covers. Fiction, like as not," he added with a mildly contemptuous smile. "But this young Banneker; it's eaten into him like acid."

"Do you know him, Pop?" inquired McHale.

"Never saw him. Don't have to. I've read his stuff."

"And you see it there?"

"Plain as Brooklyn Bridge. He'll eat mud like the rest of us."

"Come off, Pop! Where do you come in to eat mud? You've got the creamiest job on Park Row. You never have to do anything that a railroad president need shy at."

This was nearly true. Edmonds, who in his thirty years of service had filled almost every conceivable position from police headquarters reporter to managing editor, had now reverted to the phase for which the ink-spot had marked him, and was again a reporter; a sort of super-reporter, spending much of his time out around the country on important projects either of news, or of that special information necessary to a great daily, which does not always appear as news, but which may define, determine, or alter news and editorial policies.

Of him it was said on Park Row, and not without reason, that he was bigger than his paper, which screened him behind a traditional principle of anonymity, for The Courier was of the second rank in metropolitan journalism and wavered between an indigenous Bourbonism and a desire to be thought progres-

sive. The veteran's own creed was frankly socialistic; but in the Fabian phase. His was a patient philosophy, content with slow progress; but upon one point he was a passionate enthusiast. He believed in the widest possible scope of education, and in the fundamental duty of the press to stimulate it.

"We'll get the Social Revolution just as soon as we're educated up to it," he was wont to declare. "If we get it before then, it'll be a worse hash than capitalism. So let's go slow and learn."

For such a mind to be contributing to an organ of The Courier type might seem anomalous. Often Edmonds accused himself of shameful compromise; the kind of compromise constantly necessary to hold his place. Yet it was not any consideration of self-interest that bound him. He could have commanded higher pay in half a dozen open positions. Or, he could have afforded to retire, and write as he chose, for he had been a shrewd investor with wide opportunities. What really held him was his ability to forward almost imperceptibly through the kind of news political and industrial, which he, above all other journalists of his day, was able to determine and analyze, the radical projects dear to his heart. Nothing could have had a more titillating appeal to his sardonic humor than the furious editorial refutations in The Courier, of facts and tendencies plainly enunciated by him in the news columns.

Nevertheless, his impotency to speak out openly and individually the faith that was in him, left always a bitter residue in his mind. It now informed his answer to Van Cleve's characterization of his job.

"If I can sneak a tenth of the truth past the copy-desk," he said, "I'm doing well. And what sort of man am I when I go up against these big-bugs of industry at their conventions, and conferences, appearing as representative of The Courier which represents their interests? A damned hypocrite, I'd say! If they had brains enough to read between the lines of my stuff, they'd see it."

"Why don't you tell 'em?" asked Mallory lazily.

"I did, once. I told the President of the United Manufactur-

ers' Association what I really thought of their attitude toward labor."

"With what result?"

"He ordered The Courier to fire me."

"You're still there."

"Yes. But he isn't. I went after him on his record."

"All of which doesn't sound much like mud-eating, Pop."

"I've done my bit of that in my time, too. I've had jobs to do that a self-respecting swill-hustler wouldn't touch. I've sworn I wouldn't do 'em. And I've done 'em, rather than lose my job. Just as young Banneker will, when the test comes."

"I'll bet he won't," said Tommy Burt.

Mallory, who had been called away, returned in time to hear this. "You might ask him to settle the bet," he suggested. "I've just had him on the 'phone. He's coming around."

"I will," said Edmonds.

On his arrival Banneker was introduced to those of the men whom he did not know, and seated next to Edmonds.

"We've been talking about you, young fellow," said the veteran.

From most men Banneker would have found the form of address patronizing. But the thin, knotty face of Edmonds was turned upon him with so kindly a regard in the hollow eyes that he felt an innate stir of knowledge that here was a man who might be a friend. He made no answer, however, merely glancing at the speaker. To learn that the denizens of Park Row were discussing him, caused him neither surprise nor elation. While he knew that he had made hit after hit with his work, he was not inclined to over-value the easily won reputation. Edmonds's next remark did not please him.

"We were discussing how much dirt you'd eat to hold your job on The Ledger."

"The Ledger doesn't ask its men to eat dirt, Edmonds," put in Mallory sharply.

"Chop, fried potatoes, coffee, and a stein of Nicklas-brau," Banneker specified across the table to the waiter. He studied the mimeographed bill-of-fare with selective attention. "And a

slice of apple pie," he decided. Without change of tone, he looked up over the top of the menu at Edmonds slowly puffing his insignificant pipe and said: "I don't like your assumption, Mr. Edmonds."

"It's ugly," admitted the other, "but you have to answer it. Oh, not to me!" he added, smiling. "To yourself."

"It hasn't come my way yet."

"It will. Ask any of these fellows. We've all had to meet it. Yes; you, too, Mallory. We've all had to eat our peck of dirt in the sacred name of news. Some are too squeamish. They quit."

"If they're too squeamish, they'd never make real newspaper men," pronounced McHale. "You can't be too good for your business."

"Just so," said Tommy Burt acidly, "but your business can be too bad for you."

"There's got to be news. And if there's got to be news there have got to be men willing to do hard, unpleasant work, to get it," argued Mallory.

"Hard? All right," retorted Edmonds. "Unpleasant? Who cares! I'm talking about the dirty work. Wait a minute, Mallory. Didn't you ever have an assignment that was an outrage on some decent man's privacy? Or, maybe woman's? Something that made you sick at your stomach to have to do? Did you ever have to take a couple of drinks to give you nerve to ask some question that ought to have got you kicked downstairs for asking?"

Mallory, flushing angrily, was silent. But McHale spoke up. "Hell! Every business has its stinks, I guess. What about being a lawyer and serving papers? Or a manufacturer and having to bootlick the buyers? I tell you, if the public wants a certain kind of news, it's the newspaper's business to serve it to 'em; and it's the newspaper man's business to get it for his paper. I say it's up to the public."

"The public," murmured Edmonds. "Swill-eaters."

"All right! Then give 'em the kind of swill they want," cried McHale.

Edmonds so manipulated his little pipe that it pointed directly at Banneker. "Would you?" he asked.

"Would I what?"

"Give 'em the kind of swill they want? You seem to like to keep your hands clean."

"Aren't you asking me your original question in another form?" smiled the young man.

"You objected to it before."

"I'll answer it now. A friend of mine wrote to me when I went on The Ledger, advising me always to be ready on a moment's notice to look my job between the eyes and tell it to go to hell."

"Yes; I've known that done, too," interpolated Mallory. "But in those cases it isn't the job that goes." He pushed back his chair. "Don't let Pop Edmonds corrupt you with his pessimism, Banneker," he warned. "He doesn't mean half of it."

"Under the seal of the profession," said the veteran. "If there were outsiders present, it would be different. I'd have to admit that ours is the greatest, noblest, most high-minded and inspired business in the world. Free and enlightened press. Fearless defender of the right. Incorruptible agent of the people's will. Did I say 'people's will' or 'people's swill'? Don't ask me!"

The others paid their accounts and followed Mallory out, leaving Banneker alone at the table with the saturnine elder. Edmonds put a thumbful of tobacco in his pipe, and puffed silently.

"What will it get a man?" asked Banneker, setting down his coffee-cup.

"This game?" queried the other.

"Yes."

"'What shall it profit a man,'" quoted the veteran ruminatively. "You know the rest."

"No," returned Banneker decidedly. "That won't do. These fellows here haven't sold their souls."

"Or lost 'em. Maybe not," admitted the elder. "Though I wouldn't gamble strong on some of 'em. But they've lost something."

"Well, what is it? That's what I'm trying to get at."

"Independence. They're merged in the paper they write for."

"Every man's got to subordinate himself to his business, if he's to do justice to it and himself, hasn't he?"

"Yes. If you're buying or selling stocks or socks, it doesn't matter. The principles you live by aren't involved. In the newspaper game they are."

"Not in reporting, though."

"If reporting were just gathering facts and presenting them, it wouldn't be so. But you're deep enough in by now to see that reporting of a lot of things is a matter of coloring your version to the general policy of your paper. Politics, for instance, or the liquor question, or labor troubles. The best reporters get to doing it unconsciously. Chameleons."

"And you think it affects them?"

"How can it help? There's a slow poison in writing one way when you believe another."

"And that's part of the dirt-eating?"

"Well, yes. Not so obvious as some of the other kinds. Those hurt your pride, mostly. This kind hurts your self-respect."

"But where does it get you, all this business?" asked Banneker reverting to his first query.

"I'm fifty-two years old," replied Edmonds quietly.

Banneker stared. "Oh, I see!" he said presently. "And you're considered a success. Of course you *are* a success.'

"On Park Row. Would you like to be me? At fifty-two?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Banneker with a frankness which brought a faint smile to the other man's tired face. "Yet you've got where you started for, haven't you?"

"Perhaps I could answer that if I knew where I started for or where I've got to."

"Put it that you've got what you were after, then."

"No's the answer. Upper-case No. I want to get certain things over to the public intelligence. Maybe I've got one per cent of them over. Not more."

"That's something. To have a public that will follow you even part way —"

"Follow me? Bless you; they don't know me except as a lot of print that they occasionally read. I'm as anonymous as an editorial writer. And that's the most anonymous thing there is."

"That doesn't suit me at all," declared Banneker. "If I have got anything in me — and I think I have — I don't want it to make a noise like a part of a big machine. I'd rather make a small noise of my own."

"Buy a paper, then. Or write fluffy criticisms about art or theaters. Or get into the magazine field. You can write; O Lord! yes, you can write. But unless you've got the devotion of a fanatic like McHale, or a born servant of the machine like 'Parson' Gale, or an old fool like me, willing to sink your identity in your work, you'll never be content as a reporter."

"Tell me something. Why do none of the men, talking among themselves, ever refer to themselves as reporters. It's always 'newspaper men.'"

Edmonds shot a swift glance at him. "What do you think?"

"I think," he decided slowly, "it's because there is a sort of stigma attached to reporting."

"Damn you, you're right!" snapped the veteran. "Though it's the rankest heresy to admit it. There's a taint about it. There's a touch of the pariah. We try to fool ourselves into thinking there isn't. But it's there, and we admit it when we use a clumsy, misfit term like 'newspaper man.'"

"Whose fault is it?"

"The public's. The public is a snob. It likes to look down on brains. Particularly the business man. That's why I'm a Socialist. I'm ag'in the bourgeoisie."

"Aren't the newspapers to blame, in the kind of stuff they print?"

"And why do they print it?" demanded the other fiercely. "Because the public wants all the filth and scandal and invasion of privacy that it can get and still feel respectable."

"The Ledger doesn't go in for that sort of thing.'

"Not as much as some of the others. But a little more each year. It follows the trend." He got up, quenched his pipe, and reached for his hat. "Drop in here about seven-thirty when you feel like hearing the old man maunder," he said with his slight, friendly smile.

Rising, Banneker leaned over to him. "Who's the man at the next table?" he asked in a low voice, indicating a tall, broad,

glossily dressed diner who was sipping his third *demi-tasse*, in apparent detachment from the outside world.

"His name is Marrineal," replied the veteran. "He dines here occasionally alone. Don't know what he does."

"He's been listening in."

"Curious thing; he often does."

As they parted at the door, Edmonds said paternally:

"Remember, young fellow, a Park Row reputation is written on glass with a wet finger. It doesn't last during the writing."

"And only dims the glass," said Banneker reflectively.

## Chapter VIII

Heat, sudden, savage, and oppressive, bore down upon the city early that spring, smiting men in their offices, women in their homes, the horses between the shafts of their toil, so that the city was in danger of becoming disorganized. The visitation developed into the big story of successive days. It was the sort of generalized, picturesque "fluff-stuff" matter which Banneker could handle better than his compeers by sheer imaginative grasp and deftness of presentation. Being now a writer on space, paid at the rate of eight dollars a column of from thirteen to nineteen hundred words, he found the assignment profitable and the test of skill quite to his taste. Soft job though it was in a way, however, the unrelenting pressure of the heat and the task of finding, day after day, new phases and fresh phrases in which to deal with it, made inroads upon his nerves.

He took to sleeping ill again. Io Welland had come back in all the glamorous panoply of waking dreams to command and torment his loneliness of spirit. At night he dreaded the return to the draughtless room on Grove Street. In the morning, rising sticky-eyed and unrested, he shrank from the thought of the humid, dusty, unkempt hurly-burly of the office. Yet his work was never more brilliant and individual.

Having finished his writing, one reeking midnight, he sat, spent, at his desk, hating the thought of the shut-in place that he called home. Better to spend the night on a bench in some square, as he had done often enough in the earlier days. He rose, took his hat, and had reached the first landing when the steps wavered and faded in front of him and he found himself clutching for the rail. A pair of hands gripped his shoulders and held him up.

"What's the matter, Mr. Banneker?" asked a voice.

"God!" muttered Banneker. "I wish I were back on the desert."

"You want a drink," prescribed his volunteer prop.

As his vision and control reëstablished themselves, Banneker found himself being led downstairs and to the nearest bar by young Fentriss Smith, who ordered two soda cocktails.

Of Smith he knew little except that the office called him "the permanent twenty-five-dollar man." He was one of those earnest, faithful, totally uninspired reporters, who can be relied upon implicitly for routine news, but are constitutionally impotent to impart color and life to any subject whatsoever. Patiently he had seen younger and newer men overtake and pass him; but he worked on inexorably, asking for nothing, wearing the air of a scholar with some distant and abstruse determination in view. Like Banneker he had no intimates in the office.

"The desert," echoed Smith in his quiet, well-bred voice. "Isn't it pretty hot, there, too?"

"It's open," said Banneker. "I'm smotnering here."

"You look frazzled out, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I feel frazzled out; that's what I mind."

"Suppose you come out with me to-night as soon as I report to the desk," suggested the other.

Banneker, refreshed by the tingling drink, looked down at him in surprise. "Where?" he asked.

"I've got a little boat out here in the East River."

"A boat? Lord, that sounds good!" sighed Banneker.

"Does it? Then see here! Why couldn't you put in a few days with me, and cool off? I've often wanted to talk to you about the newspaper business, and get your ideas."

"But I'm newer at it than you are."

"For a fact! Just the same you've got the trick of it and I haven't. I'll go around to your place while you pack a suitcase, and we're off."

"That's very good of you." Accustomed though he was to the swift and ready comradeship of a newspaper office, Banneker was puzzled by this advance from the shy and remote Smith. "All right: if you'll let me share expenses," he said presently.

Smith seemed taken aback at this. "Just as you like," he assented. "Though I don't quite know — We'll talk of that later."

While Banneker was packing in his room, Smith, seated on the window-sill, remarked:

"I ought to tell you that we have to go through a bad district to get there."

"The Tunnel Gang?" asked Banneker, wise in the plague spots of the city.

"Just this side of their stamping ground. It's a gang of wharf rats. There have been a number of hold-ups, and last week a dead woman was found under the pier."

Banneker made an unobtrusive addition to his packing. "They'll have to move fast to catch me," he observed.

"Two of us together won't be molested. But if you're alone, be careful. The police in that precinct are no good. They're either afraid or they stand in with the gang."

On Fifth Avenue the pair got a late-cruising taxicab whose driver, however, declined to take them nearer than one block short of the pier. "The night air in that place ain't good fer weak constitutions," he explained. "One o' my pals got a headache last week down on the pier from bein' beaned with a sandbag."

No one interfered with the two reporters, however. A whistle from the end of the pier evolved from the watery dimness a dinghy, which, in a hundred yards of rowing, delivered them into a small but perfectly appointed yacht. Banneker, looking about the luxurious cabin, laughed a little.

"That was a bad guess of mine about half expenses," he said good-humoredly. "I'd have to mortgage my future for a year. Do you own this craft?"

"My father does. He's been called back West."

Bells rang, the wheel began to churn, and Banneker, falling asleep in his berth with a vivifying breeze blowing across him, awoke in broad daylight to a view of sparkling little waves which danced across his vision to smack impudently the flanks of the speeding craft.

"We'll be in by noon," was Smith's greeting as they met on the companionway for a swim.

"What do you do it for?" asked Banneker, seated at the

breakfast table, with an appetite such as he had not known for weeks.

"Do what?"

"Two men's work at twenty-five per for The Ledger?"

"Training."

"Are you going to stick to the business?"

"The family," explained Smith, "own a newspaper in Toledo. It fell to them by accident. Our real business is manufacturing farm machinery, and none of us has ever tried or thought of manufacturing newspapers. So they wished on me the job of learning how."

"Do you like it?"

"Not particularly. But I'm going through with it.'

Banneker felt a new and surprised respect for his host. He could forecast the kind of small city newspaper that Smith would make; careful, conscientious, regular in politics, loyal to what it deemed the best interests of the community, single-minded in its devotion to the Smith family and its properties; colorless, characterless, and without vision or leadership in all that a newspaper should, according to Banneker's opinion, stand for. So he talked with the fervor of an enthusiast, a missionary, a devotee, who saw in that daily chronicle of the news an agency to stir men's minds and spur their thoughts, if need be, to action; at the same time the mechanism and instrument of power, of achievement, of success. Fentriss Smith listened and was troubled in spirit by these unknown fires. He had supposed respectability to be the final aim and end of a sound newspaper tradition.

The apparent intimacy which had sprung up between twenty-five-dollar Smith and the reserved, almost hermit-like Banneker was the subject of curious and amused commentary in The Ledger office. Mallory hazarded a humorous guess that Banneker was tutoring Smith in the finer arts of journalism, which was not so far amiss as its proponent might have supposed.

The Great Heat broke several evenings later in a drench of rain and wind. This, being in itself important news, kept Banneker late at his writing, and he had told his host not to wait, that he would join him on the yacht sometime about midnight. So Smith had gone on alone.

The next morning Tommy Burt, lounging into the office from an early assignment, approached the City Desk with a twinkle far back in his lively eyes.

"Hear anything of a shoot-fest up in the Bad Lands last night?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Mr. Greenough. "They're getting to be everyday occurrences up there. Is it on the police slips, Mr. Mallory?"

"No. Nothing in that line," answered the assistant, looking over his assortment.

"Police are probably suppressing it," opined Burt.

"Have you got the story?" queried Mr. Greenough.

"In outline. It isn't really my story."

"Whose is it, then?"

"That's part of it." Tommy Burt leaned against Mallory's desk and appeared to be revolving some delectable thought in his mind.

"Tommy," said Mallory, "they didn't open that committee meeting you've been attending with a corkscrew, did they?"

"I'm intoxicated with the chaste beauties of my story, which isn't mine," returned the dreamily smiling Mr. Burt. "Here it is, boiled down. Guest on an anchored yacht returning late, sober, through the mist. Wharf-gang shooting craps in a pier-shed. They size him up and go to it; six of 'em. Knives and one gun: maybe more. The old game: one asks for the time. Another sneaks up behind and gives the victim the elbow-garrote. The rest rush him. Well, they got as far as the garrote. Everything lovely and easy. Then Mr. Victim introduces a few specialties. Picks a gun from somewhere around his shirt-front, shoots the garroter over his shoulder; kills the man in front, who is at him with a stiletto, ducks a couple of shots from the gang, and lays out two more of 'em. The rest take to the briny. Tally: two dead, one dying, one wounded, Mr. Guest walks to the shore end, meets two patrolmen, and turns in his gun. 'I've done a job for you,' says he. So they pinch him. He's in the police station, *incomunicado*."

Throughout the narrative, Mr. Greenough had thrown in

little, purring interjections of "Good! Good!" — "Yes."— "Ah! good!" At the conclusion Mallory exclaimed!

"Moses! That is a story! You say it isn't yours? Why not?"

"Because it's Banneker's."

"Why?"

"He's the guest with the gun."

Mallory jumped in his chair. "Banneker!" he exclaimed. "Oh, hell!" he added disconsolately.

"Takes the shine out of the story, doesn't it?" observed Burt with a malicious smile.

One of the anomalous superstitions of newspaperdom is that nothing which happens to a reporter in the line of his work is or can be "big news." The mere fact that he is a reporter is enough to blight the story.

"What was Banneker doing down there?" queried Mr. Greenough.

"Visiting on a yacht."

"Is that so?" There was a ray of hope in the other's face. The glamour of yachting association might be made to cast a radiance about the event, in which the damnatory fact that the principal figure was a mere reporter could be thrown into low relief. Such is the view which journalistic snobbery takes of the general public's snobbery. "Whose yacht?"

Again the spiteful little smile appeared on Burt's lips as he dashed the rising hope. "Fentriss Smith's."

And again the expletive of disillusion burst from between Mallory's teeth as he saw the front-page double-column spread, a type-specialty of the usually conservative Ledger upon which it prided itself, dwindle to a carefully handled inside-page three-quarter of a column.

"You say that Mr. Banneker is in the police station?" asked the city editor.

"Or at headquarters. They're probably working the third degree on him."

"That won't do," declared the city desk incumbent, with conviction. He caught up the telephone, got the paper's City Hall reporter, and was presently engaged in some polite but

pointed suggestions to His Honor the Mayor. Shortly after, Police Headquarters called; the Chief himself was on the wire.

"The Ledger is behind Mr. Banneker, Chief," said Mr. Greenough crisply. . . . "Carrying concealed weapons? If your men in that precinct were fit to be on the force, there would be no need for private citizens to go armed. . . . You get the point, I see. Good-bye."

"Unless I am a bad guesser we'll have Banneker back here by evening. And there'll be no manhandling in his case," Mallory said to Burt.

Counsel was taken of Mr. Gordon, as soon as that astute managing editor arrived, as to the handling of the difficult situation. The Ledger, always cynically intolerant of any effort to better the city government, as savoring of "goo-gooism," which was its special *bête noire*, could not well make the shooting a basis for a general attack upon police laxity, though it was in this that lay the special news possibility of the event. On the other hand, the thing was far too sensational to be ignored or too much slurred.

Andreas, the assistant managing editor, in charge of the paper's make-up, a true news-hound with an untainted delight in the unusual and striking, no matter what its setting might be, who had been called into the conference, advocated "smearing it all over the front page, with Banneker's first-hand statement for the lead — pictures too."

Him, Mr. Greenough, impassive joss of the city desk, regarded with a chill eye. "One reporter visiting another gets into a muss and shoots up some riverside toughs," he remarked contemptuously. "You can hardly expect our public to get greatly excited over that. Are we going into the business of exploiting our own cubs?"

Thereupon there was sharp discussion to which Mr. Gordon put an end by remarking that the evening papers would doubtless give them a lead; meantime they could get Banneker's version.

First to come in was The Evening New Yorker, the most vapid of all the local prints, catering chiefly to the uptown and

shopping element. Its heading half-crossed the page proclaiming "Guest of Yachtsman Shoots Down Thugs." Nowhere in the article did it appear that Banneker had any connection with the newspaper world. He was made to appear as a young Westerner on a visit to the yacht of a millionaire business man, having come on from his ranch in the desert, and presumptively — to add the touch of godhead — a millionaire himself.

"The stinking liars!" said Andreas.

"That settles it," declared Mr. Gordon. "We'll give the facts plainly and without sensationalism; but all the facts."

"Including Mr. Banneker's connection here?" inquired Mr. Greenough.

"Certainly."

The other evening papers, more honest than The Evening New Yorker, admitted, though, as it were, regretfully and in an inconspicuous finale to their accounts that the central figure of the sensation was only a reporter. But the fact of his being guest on a yacht was magnified and glorified.

At five o'clock Banneker arrived, having been bailed out after some difficulty, for the police were frightened and ugly, foreseeing that this swift vengeance upon the notorious gang, meted out by a private hand, would throw a vivid light upon their own inefficiency and complaisance. Happily the District Attorney's office was engaged in one of its periodical feuds with the Police Department over some matter of graft gone astray, and was more inclined to make a cat's-paw than a victim out of Banneker.

Though inwardly strung to a high pitch, for the police officials had kept him sleepless through the night by their habitual inquisition, Banneker held himself well in hand as he went to the City Desk to report gravely that he had been unable to come earlier.

"So we understand, Mr. Banneker," said Mr. Greenough, his placid features for once enlivened. "That was a good job you did. I congratulate you."

"Thank you, Mr. Greenough," returned Banneker. "I had to do it or get done. And, at that, it wasn't much of a trick. They were a yellow lot."

"Very likely: very likely. You've handled a gun before."

"Only in practice."

"Ever shot anybody before?"

"No, sir."

"How does it feel?" inquired the city editor, turning his pale eyes on the other and fussing nervously with his fingers.

"At first you want to go on killing," answered Banneker. "Then, when it's over, there's a big let-down. It doesn't seem as if it were you." He paused and added boyishly: "The evening papers are making an awful fuss over it."

"What do you expect? It isn't every day that a Wild West Show with real bullets and blood is staged in this effete town."

"Of course I knew there'd be a kick-up about it," admitted Banneker. "But, some way — well, in the West, if a gang gets shot up, there's quite a bit of talk for a while, and the boys want to buy the drinks for the fellow that does it, but it doesn't spread all over the front pages. I suppose I still have something of the Western view. . . . How much did you want of this, Mr. Greenough?" he concluded in a business-like tone.

"You are not doing the story, Mr. Banneker. Tommy Burt is."

"I'm not writing it? Not any of it?"

"Certainly not. You're the hero"— there was a hint of elongation of the first syllable which might have a sardonic connotation from those pale and placid lips—"not the historian. Burt will interview you."

"A Patriot reporter has already. I gave him a statement."

Mr. Greenough frowned. "It would have been as well to have waited. However. . . ."

"Oh, Banneker," put in Mallory, "Judge Enderby wants you to call at his office."

"Who's Judge Enderby?"

"Chief Googler of the Goo-Goos; the Law Enforcement Society lot. They call him the ablest honest lawyer in New York. He's an old crab. Hates the newspapers, particularly us."

"Why?"

"He cherishes some theory," said Mr. Greenough in his most

toneless voice, "that a newspaper ought to be conducted solely in the interests of people like himself."

"Is there any reason why I should go chasing around to see him?"

"That's as you choose. He doesn't see reporters often. Perhaps it would be as well."

"His outfit are after the police," explained Mallory. "That's what he wants you for. It's part of their political game. Always politics."

"Well, he can wait until to-morrow, I suppose," remarked Banneker indifferently.

Greenough examined him with impenetrable gaze. This was a very cavalier attitude toward Judge Willis Enderby. For Enderby was a man of real power. He might easily have been the most munificently paid corporation attorney in the country but for the various kinds of business which he would not, in his own homely phrase, "poke at with a burnt stick." Notwithstanding his prejudices, he was confidential legal adviser, in personal and family affairs, to a considerable percentage of the important men and women of New York. He was supposed to be the only man who could handle that bull-elephant of finance, ruler of Wall Street, and, when he chose to give it his contemptuous attention, dictator, through his son and daughters, of the club and social world of New York, old Poultney Masters, in the apoplectic rages into which the slightest thwart to his will plunged him. To Enderby's adroitness the financier (one of whose pet vanities was a profound and wholly baseless faith in himself as a connoisseur of art) owed it that he had not become a laughing-stock through his purchase of a pair of particularly flagrant Murillos, planted for his special behoof by a gang of clever Italian swindlers. Rumor had it that when Enderby had privately summed up his client's case for his client's benefit before his client as referee, in these words: "And, Mr. Masters, if you act again in these matters without consulting me, you must find another lawyer; I cannot afford fools for clients"— they had to call in a physician and resort to the ancient expedient of bleeding, to save the great man's cerebral arteries from bursting.

Toward the public press, Enderby's attitude was the exact reverse of Horace Vanney's. For himself, he unaffectedly disliked and despised publicity; for the interests which he represented, he delegated it to others. He would rarely be interviewed; his attitude toward the newspapers was consistently repellent. Consequently his infrequent utterances were treasured as pearls, and given a prominence far above those of the too eager and over-friendly Mr. Vanney, who, incidentally, was his associate on the directorate of the Law Enforcement Society. The newspapers did not like Willis Enderby any more than he liked them. But they cherished for him an unrequited respect.

That a reporter, a nobody of yesterday whose association with The Ledger constituted his only claim to any status whatever, should profess indifference to a summons from a man of Enderby's position, suggested affectation to Mr. Greenough's suspicions. Young Mr. Banneker's head was already swelling, was it? Very well; in the course of time and his duties, Mr. Greenough would apply suitable remedies.

If Banneker were, indeed, taking a good conceit of himself from the conspicuous position achieved so unexpectedly, the morning papers did nothing to allay it. Most of them slurred over, as lightly as possible, the fact of his journalistic connection; as in the evening editions, the yacht feature was kept to the fore. There were two exceptions. The Ledger itself, in a colorless and straightforward article, frankly identified the hero of the episode, in the introductory sentence, as a member of its city staff, and his host of the yacht as another journalist. But there was one notable omission about which Banneker determined to ask Tommy Burt as soon as he could see him. The Patriot, most sensational of the morning issues, splurged wildly under the caption, "Yacht Guest Cleans Out Gang Which Cowed Police." The Sphere, in an editorial, demanded a sweeping and honest investigation of the conditions which made life unsafe in the greatest of cities. The Sphere was always demanding sweeping and honest investigations, and not infrequently getting them. In Greenough's opinion this undesirable result was likely to be achieved now. To Mr. Gordon he said:

"We ought to shut down all we can on the Banneker follow-up. An investigation with our man as prosecuting witness would put us in the position of trying to reform the police, and would play into the hands of the Enderby crowd."

The managing editor shook a wise and grizzled head. "If The Patriot keeps up its whooping and The Sphere its demanding, the administration will have to do something. After all, Mr. Greenough, things have become pretty unendurable in the Murder Precinct."

"That's true. But the signed statement of Banneker's in The Patriot — it's really an interview faked up as a statement — is a savage attack on the whole administration."

"I understand," remarked Mr. Gordon, "that they were going to beat him up scientifically in the station house when Smith came in and scared them out of it."

"Yes. Banneker is pretty angry over it. You can't blame him. But that's no reason why we should alienate the city administration....Then you think, Mr. Gordon, that we'll have to keep the story running?"

"I think, Mr. Greenough, that we'll have to give the news," answered the managing editor austerely. "Where is Banneker now?"

"With Judge Enderby, I believe. In case of an investigation he won't be much use to us until it's over."

"Can't be helped," returned Mr. Gordon serenely. "We'll stand by our man."

Banneker had gone to the old-fashioned offices of Enderby & Enderby, in a somewhat inimical frame of mind. Expectant of an invitation to aid the Law Enforcement Society in cleaning up a pest-hole of crime, he was half determined to have as little to do with it as possible. Overnight consideration had developed in him the theory that the function of a newspaper is informative, not reformative; that when a newspaper man has correctly adduced and frankly presented the facts, his social as well as his professional duty is done. Others might hew out the trail thus blazed; the reporter, bearing his searchlight, should pass on to other dark spots. All his theories evaporated as soon as he con-

fronted Judge Enderby, forgotten in the interest inspired by the man.

A portrait painter once said of Willis Enderby that his face was that of a saint, illumined, not by inspiration, but by shrewdness. With his sensitiveness to beauty of whatever kind, Banneker felt the extraordinary quality of the face, beneath its grim outline, interpreting it from the still depth of the quiet eyes rather than from the stern mouth and rather tyrannous nose. He was prepared for an abrupt and cold manner, and was surprised when the lawyer rose to shake hands, giving him a greeting of courtly congratulation upon his courage and readiness. If the purpose of this was to get Banneker to expand, as he suspected, it failed. The visitor sensed the cold reserve behind the smile.

"Would you be good enough to run through this document?" requested the lawyer, motioning Banneker to a seat opposite himself, and handing him a brief synopsis of what the Law Enforcement Society hoped to prove regarding police laxity.

Exercising that double faculty of mind which later became a part of the Banneker legend in New York journalism, the reader, whilst absorbing the main and quite simple points of the report, recalled an instance in which an Atkinson & St. Philip ticket agent had been maneuvered into a posture facing a dazzling sunset, and had adjusted his vision to find it focused upon the barrel of a 45. Without suspecting the Judge of hold-up designs, he nevertheless developed a parallel. Leaving his chair he walked over and sat by the window. Halfway through the document, he quietly laid it aside and returned the lawyer's studious regard.

"Have you finished?" asked Judge Enderby.

"No."

"You do not find it interesting?"

"Less interesting than your idea in giving it to me."

"What do you conceive that to have been?"

By way of reply, Banneker cited the case of Tim Lake, the robbed agent. "I think," he added with a half smile, "that you and I will do better in the open."

"I think so, too. Mr. Banneker, are you honest?"

"Where I came from, that would be regarded as a trouble-hunter's question."

"I ask you to regard it as important and take it without offense."

"I don't know about that," returned Banneker gravely. "We'll see. Honest, you say. Are you?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you begin by doubting the honesty of a stranger against whom you know nothing?"

"Legal habit, I dare say. Fortified, in this case, by your association with The Ledger."

"You haven't a high opinion of my paper?"

"The very highest, of its adroitness and expertness. It can make the better cause appear the worse with more skill than any other journal in America."

"I thought that was the specialty of lawyers."

Judge Enderby accepted the touch with a smile.

"A lawyer is an avowed special pleader. He represents one side. A newspaper is supposed to be without bias and to present the facts for the information of its one client, the public. You will readily appreciate the difference."

"I do. Then you don't consider The Ledger honest."

Judge Enderby's composed glance settled upon the morning's issue, spread upon his desk. "I have, I assume, the same opinion of The Ledger's honesty that you have."

"Do you mind explaining that to me quite simply, so that I shall be sure to understand it?" invited Banneker.

"You have read the article about your exploit?"

"Yes."

"Is that honest?"

"It is as accurate a job as I've ever known done."

"Granted. Is it honest?"

"I don't know," answered the other after a pause. "I intend to find out."

"You intend to find out why it is so reticent on every point that might impugn the police, I take it. I could tell you; but yours is the better way. You gave the same interview to your

own paper that you gave to The Patriot, I assume. By the way, what a commentary on journalism that the most scurrilous sheet in New York should have given the fullest and frankest treatment to the subject; a paper written by the dregs of Park Row for the reading of race-track touts and ignorant servant girls!"

"Yes; I gave them the same interview. It may have been crowded out —"

"For lack of space," supplied Enderby in a tone which the other heartily disliked. "Mr. Banneker, I thought that this was to be in the open."

"I'm wrong," confessed the other. "I'll know by this evening why the police part was handled that way, and if it was policy —" He stopped, considering.

"Well?" prompted the other.

"I'll go through to the finish with your committee."

"You're as good as pledged," retorted the lawyer. "I shall expect to hear from you."

As soon as he could find Tommy Burt, Banneker put to him the direct question. "What is the matter with the story as I gave it to you?"

Burt assumed an air of touching innocence. "The story had to be handled with great care," he explained blandly.

"Come off, Tommy. Didn't you write the police part?"

Tommy Burt's eyes denoted the extreme of candor. "It was suggested to me that your views upon the police, while interesting and even important, might be misunderstood."

"Is *that* so? And who made the suggestion?"

"An all-wise city desk."

"Thank you, Tommy."

"The Morning Ledger," volunteered Tommy Burt, "has a high and well-merited reputation for its fidelity to the principles of truth and fairness and to the best interests of the reading public. It never gives the public any news to play with that it thinks the dear little thing ought not to have. Did you say anything? No? Well; you meant it. You're wrong. The Ledger is the highest-class newspaper in New York. We are the Elect!"

In his first revulsion of anger, Banneker was for going to Mr. Greenough and having it out with him. If it meant his resignation, very good. He was ready to look his job in the eye and tell it to go to hell. Turning the matter over in his mind, however, he decided upon another course. So far as the sensational episode of which he was the central figure went, he would regard himself consistently as a private citizen with no responsibility whatsoever to The Ledger. Let the paper print or suppress what it chose; his attitude toward it would be identical with his attitude toward the other papers. Probably the office powers would heartily disapprove of his having any dealings with Enderby and his Law Enforcement Society. Let them! He telephoned a brief but final message to Enderby & Enderby. When, late that night, Mr. Gordon called him over and suggested that it was highly desirable to let the whole affair drop out of public notice as soon as the startling facts would permit, he replied that Judge Enderby had already arranged to push an investigation.

"Doubtless," observed the managing editor. "It is his specialty. But without your evidence they can't go far."

"They can have my evidence."

Mr. Gordon, who had been delicately balancing his letter-opener, now delivered a whack of such unthinking ferocity upon his fat knuckle as to produce a sharp pang. He gazed in surprise and reproach upon the aching thumb and something of those emotions informed the regard which he turned slowly upon Banneker.

Mr. Gordon's frame of mind was unenviable. The Inside Room, moved by esoteric considerations, political and, more remotely, financial, had issued to him a managerial ukase; no police investigation if it could be avoided. Now, news was the guise in which Mr. Gordon sincerely worshiped Truth, the God. But Mammon, in the Inside Room, held the purse-strings Mr. Gordon had arrived at his honorable and well-paid position, not by wisdom alone, but also by compromise. Here was a situation where news must give way to the more essential interests of the paper.

"Mr. Banneker," he said, "that investigation will take a great deal of your time; more, I fear, than the paper can afford to give you."

"They will arrange to put me on the stand in the mornings."

"Further, any connection between a Ledger man and the Enderby Committee is undesirable and injudicious."

"I'm sorry," answered Banneker simply. "I've said I'd go through with it."

Mr. Gordon selected a fresh knuckle for his modified drumming. "Have you considered your duty to the paper, Mr. Banneker? If not, I advise you to do so." The careful manner, more than the words, implied threat.

Banneker leaned forward as if for a confidential communication, as he lapsed into a gross Westernism:

"Mr. Gordon, *I* am paying for this round of drinks."

Somehow the managing editor received the impression that this remark, delivered in just that tone of voice and in its own proper environment, was usually accompanied by a smooth motion of the hand toward the pistol holster.

Banneker, after asking whether there was anything more, and receiving a displeased shake of the head, went away.

"Now," said he to the waiting Tommy Burt, "they'll probably fire me."

"Let 'em! You can get plenty of other jobs. But I don't think they will. Old Gordon is really with you. It makes him sick to have to doctor news."

Sleepless until almost morning, Banneker reviewed in smallest detail his decision and the situation to which it had led. He thought that he had taken the right course. He felt that Miss Camilla would approve. Judge Enderby's personality, he recognized, had exerted some influence upon his decision. He had conceived for the lawyer an instinctive respect and liking. There was about him a power of attraction, not readily definable, but seeming mysteriously to assert some hidden claim from the past.

Where had he seen that fine and still face before?

## Chapter IX

Sequels of a surprising and diverse character followed Banneker's sudden fame. The first to manifest itself was disconcerting. On the Wednesday following the fight on the pier, Mrs. Brashear intercepted him in the hallway.

"I'm sure we all admire what you did, Mr. Banneker," she began, in evident trepidation.

The subject of this eulogy murmured something deprecatory.

"It was very brave of you. Most praiseworthy. We appreciate it, all of us. Yes, indeed. It's very painful, Mr. Banneker. I never expected to — to — indeed, I couldn't have believed —" Mrs. Brashear's plump little hands made gestures so fluttery and helpless that her lodger was moved to come to her aid.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Brashear? What's troubling you?"

"If you could make it convenient," said she tremulously, "when your month is up. I shouldn't think of asking you before."

"Are you giving me notice?" he inquired in amazement.

"If you don't mind, please. The notoriety, the — the — your being arrested. You were arrested, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes. But the coroner's jury cleared —"

"Such a thing never happened to any of my guests before. To have my house in the police records," wept Mrs. Brashear. "Really, Mr. Banneker, really! You can't know how it hurts one's pride."

"I'll go next week," said the evicted one, divided between amusement and annoyance, and retired to escape another outburst of grief.

Now that the matter was presented to him, he was rather glad to be leaving. Quarters somewhere in mid-town, more in consonance with his augmented income, suggested themselves as highly desirable. Since the affray he had been the object of irksome attentions from his fellow lodgers. It is difficult to say whether he found the more unendurable young Wickert's curiosity regarding details, Hainer's pompous adulation, or Lam-

bert's admiring but jocular attitude. The others deemed it their duty never to refrain from some reference to the subject wherever and whenever they encountered him. The one exception was Miss Westlake. She congratulated him once, quietly but with warm sincerity; and when next she came to his door, dealt with another topic.

"Mrs. Brashear tells me that you are leaving, Mr. Banneker."

"Did she tell you why? That she has fired me out?"

"No. She didn't."

Banneker, a little surprised and touched at the landlady's reticence, explained.

"Ah, well," commented Miss Westlake, "you would soon have outgrown us in any case."

"I'm not so sure. Where one lives doesn't so much matter. And I'm a creature of habit."

"I think that you are going to be a very big man, Mr. Banneker."

"Do you?" He smiled down at her. "Now, why?"

She did not answer his smile. "You've got power," she replied. "And you have mastered your medium — or gone far toward it."

"I'm grateful for your good opinion," he began courteously; but she broke in on him, shaking her head.

"If it were mine alone, it wouldn't matter. It's the opinion of those who know. Mr. Banneker, I've been taking a liberty."

"You're the last person in the world to do that, I should think," he replied smilingly.

"But I have. You may remember my asking you once when those little sketches that I retyped so often were to be published."

"Yes. I never did anything with them."

"I did. I showed them to Violet Thornborough. She is an old friend."

Ignorant of the publication world outside of Park Row, Banneker did not recognize a name, unknown to the public, which in the inner literary world connoted all that was finest, most perceptive, most discriminating and helpful in selective criticism. Miss Thornborough had been the first to see and foster half of the glimmering and feeble radiances which had

later grown to be the manifest lights of the magazine and book world, thanks largely to her aid and encouragement. The next name mentioned by Miss Westlake was well enough known to Banneker, however. The critic, it appears, had, with her own hands, borne the anonymous, typed copies to the editorial sanctum of the foremost of monthlies, and, claiming a prerogative, refused to move aside from the pathway of orderly business until the Great Gaines himself, editor and autocrat of the publication, had read at least one of them. So the Great Gaines indulged Miss Thornborough by reading one. He then indulged himself by reading three more.

"Your goose," he pronounced, "is not fledged; but there may be a fringe of swan feathers. Bring him to see me."

"I haven't the faintest idea of who, what, or where he is," answered the insistent critic.

"Then hire a detective at our expense," smiled the editor. "And, please, as you go, can't you lure away with you Mr. Harvey Wheelwright, our most popular novelist, now in the reception-room wishing us to publish his latest enormity? Us!" concluded the Great Gaines sufficiently.

Having related the episode to its subject, Miss Westlake said diffidently: "Do you think it was inexcusably impertinent of me?"

"No. I think it was very kind."

"Then you'll go to see Mr. Gaines?"

"One of these days. When I get out of this present scrape. And I hope you'll keep on copying my Sunday stuff after I leave. Nobody else would be so patient with my dreadful handwriting."

She gave him a glance and a little flush of thankfulness. Matters had begun to improve with Miss Westlake. But it was due to Banneker that she had won through her time of desperation. Now, through his suggestion, she was writing successfully, quarter and half column "general interest" articles for the Woman's Page of the Sunday Ledger. If she could in turn help Banneker to recognition, part of her debt would be paid. As for him, he was interested in, but not greatly expectant of, the Gaines invitation. Still, if he were cast adrift from The Ledger

because of activity in the coming police inquiry, there was a possible port in the magazine world.

Meantime there pressed the question of a home. Cressey ought to afford help on that. He called the gilded youth on the telephone.

"Hello, old fire-eater!" cried Cressey. "Some little hero, aren't you! Bully work, my boy. I'm proud to know you.... What; quarters? Easiest thing you know. I've got the very thing — just like a real-estate agent. Let's see; this is your Monday at Sherry's, isn't it? All right. I'll meet you there."

Providentially, as it might appear, a friend of Cressey's, having secured a diplomatic appointment, was giving up his bachelor apartment in the select and central Regalton.

"Cheap as dirt," said the enthusiastic Cressey, beaming at Banneker over his cocktail that evening. "Two rooms and bath; fully furnished, and you can get it for eighteen hundred a year."

"Quite a raise from the five dollars a week I've been paying," smiled Banneker.

"Pshaw! You've got to live up to your new reputation. You're somebody, now, Banneker. All New York is talking about you. Why, I'm afraid to say I know you for fear they'll think I'm bragging."

"All of which doesn't increase my income," pointed out the other.

"It will. Just wait. One way or another you'll capitalize that reputation. That's the way New York is."

"That isn't the way *I* am, however. I'll capitalize my brains and ability, if I've got 'em; not my gun-play."

"Your gun-play will advertise your brains and ability, then," retorted Cressey. "Nobody expects you to make a princely income shooting up toughs on the water-front. But your having done it will put you in the lime-light where people will notice you. And being noticed is the beginning of success in this-man's-town. I'm not sure it isn't the end, too. Just see how the head waiter fell all over himself when you came in. I expect he's telling that bunch at the long table yonder who you are, now."

"Let him," returned Banneker comfortably, his long-bred

habit of un-self-consciousness standing him in good stead. "They'll all forget it soon enough."

As he glanced over at the group around the table, the man who was apparently acting as host caught his eye and nodded in friendly fashion.

"Oh, you know Marrineal, do you?" asked Cressey in surprise.

"I've seen him, but I've never spoken to him. He dines sometimes in a queer little restaurant way downtown, just off the Swamp. Who is he, anyway?"

"Puzzle. Nobody in the clubs knows him. He's a spender. Bit of a rounder, too, I expect. Plays the Street, and beats it, too."

"Who's the little beauty next him?"

"You a rising light of Park Row, and not know Betty Raleigh? She killed 'em dead in London in romantic comedy and now she's come back here to repeat."

"Oh, yes. Opening to-night, isn't she? I've got a seat." He looked over at Marrineal, who was apparently protesting against his neighbor's reversed wine-glass. "So that's Mr. Marrineal's little style of game, is it?" He spoke crudely, for the apparition of the girl was quite touching in its youth, and delight, and candor of expression, whereas he had read into Marrineal's long, handsome, and blandly mature face a touch of the satyr. He resented the association.

"No; it isn't," replied Cressey promptly. "If it is, he's in the wrong pew. Miss Raleigh is straight as they make 'em, from all I hear."

"She looks it," admitted Banneker.

"At that, she's in a rather sporty lot. Do you know that chap three seats to her left?"

Banneker considered the diner, a round-faced, high-colored, youthful man of perhaps thirty-five, with a roving and merry eye. "No," he answered. "I never saw him before."

"That's Del Eyre," remarked Cressey casually, and appearing not to look at Banneker.

"A friend of yours?" The indifference of the tone indicated

to his companion either that Banneker did not identify Delavan Eyre by his marriage, or that he maintained extraordinary control over himself, or that the queer, romantic stories of Io Welland's "passion in the desert" were gross exaggerations. Cressey inclined to the latter belief.

"Not specially," he answered the question. "He belongs to a couple of my clubs. Everybody likes Del; even Mrs. Del. But his pace is too swift for me. Just at present he is furnishing transportation, sixty horse-power, for Tarantina, the dancer who is featured in Betty Raleigh's show."

"Is she over there with them?"

"Oh, no. She wouldn't be. It isn't as sporty as all that." He rose to shake hands with a short, angular young man, dressed to a perfection as accurate as Banneker's own, and excelling him in one distinctive touch, a coat-flower of gold-and-white such as no other in New York could wear, since only in one conservatory was that special orchid successfully grown. By it Banneker recognized Poultney Masters, Jr., the son and heir of the tyrannous old financier who had for years bullied and browbeaten New York to his wayward old heart's content. In his son there was nothing of the bully, but through the amiability of manner Banneker could feel a quiet force. Cressey introduced them.

"We're just having coffee," said Banneker. "Will you join us?"

"Thank you; I must go back to my party. I came over to express my personal obligation to you for cleaning out that gang of wharf-rats. My boat anchors off there. I hope to see you aboard her sometime."

"You owe me no thanks," returned Banneker good-humoredly "What I did was to save my own precious skin."

"The effect was the same. After this the rats will suspect every man of being a Banneker in disguise, and we shall have no more trouble."

"You see!" remarked Cressey triumphantly as Masters went away. "I told you you'd arrived."

"Do you count a word of ordinary courtesy as so much?" inquired Banneker, surprised and amused.

"From Junior? I certainly do. No Masters ever does anything without having figured out its exact meaning in advance."

"And what does this mean?" asked the other, still unimpressed.

"For one thing, that the Masters influence will be back of you, if the police try to put anything over. For another, that you've got the broadest door to society open to you, if Junior follows up his hint about the yacht."

"I haven't the time," returned Banneker with honest indifference. He sipped his coffee thoughtfully. "Cressey," he said, "if I had a newspaper of my own in New York, do you know what I'd do with it?"

"Make money."

"I hope so. But whether I did or not, I'd set out to puncture that bubble of the Masters power and supremacy. It isn't right for any man to have that power just through money. It isn't American."

"The old man would smash your paper in six months."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Nobody has ever taken a shot at him yet. He may be more vulnerable than he looks. . . . Speaking of money, I suppose I'd better take that apartment. God knows how I'll pay for it, especially if I lose my job."

"If you lose your job I'll get you a better one on Wall Street to-morrow."

"On the strength of Poultney Masters, Jr., shaking hands with me, I suppose."

"Practically. It may not get into your newspapers, but the Street will know all about it to-morrow."

"It's a queer city. And it's a queer way to get on in it, by being quick on the trigger. Well, I'm off for the theater."

Between acts, Banneker, walking out to get air, was conscious of being the object of comment and demonstration. He heard his name spoken in half whispers; saw nods and jerks of the head; was an involuntary eavesdropper upon a heated discussion; "That's the man."—"No; it ain't. The paper says he's a big feller." — "This guy ain't a reporter. Pipe his clothes." — "Well, he's big if you size him right. Look at his shoulders."—

"I'll betcha ten he ain't the man." And an apologetic young fellow ran after him to ask if he was not, in truth, Mr. Banneker of The Ledger. Being no more than human, he experienced a feeling of mild excitation over all this. But no sooner had the curtain risen on the second act than he quite forgot himself and his notoriety in the fresh charm of the comedy, and the delicious simplicity of Betty Raleigh as the heroine. That the piece was destined to success was plain, even so early. As the curtain fell again, and the star appeared, dragging after her a long, gaunt, exhausted, alarmed man in horn-rimmed spectacles, who had been lurking in a corner suffering from incipient nervous breakdown and illusions of catastrophe, he being the author, the body of the house rose and shouted. A hand fell on Banneker's shoulder.

"Come behind at the finish?" said a voice.

Turning, Banneker met the cynical and near-sighted eyes of Gurney, The Ledger's dramatic critic, with whom he had merely a nodding acquaintance, as Gurney seldom visited the office except at off-hours.

"Yes; I'd like to," he answered.

"Little Betty spotted you and has been demanding that the management bring you back for inspection."

"The play is a big success, isn't it?"

"I give it a year's run," returned the critic authoritatively. "Laurence has written it to fit Raleigh like a glove. She's all they said of her in London. And when she left here a year ago, she was just a fairly good *ingénue*. However, she's got brains, which is the next best thing in the theatrical game to marriage with the manager — or near-marriage."

Banneker, considering Gurney's crow-footed and tired leer, decided that he did not like the critic much.

Back-of-curtain after a successful opening provides a hectic and scrambled scene to the unaccustomed eye. Hastily presented to a few people, Banneker drifted to one side and, seating himself on a wire chair, contentedly assumed the rôle of onlooker. The air was full of laughter and greetings and kisses; light-hearted, offhand, gratulatory kisses which appeared to be the natural

currency of felicitation. Betty Raleigh, lovely, flushed, and athrill with nervous exaltation, flung him a smile as she passed, one hand hooked in the arm of her leading man.

"You're coming to supper with us later," she called.

"Am I?" said Banneker.

"Of course. I've got something to ask you." She spoke as one expectant of unquestioning obedience: this was her night of glory and power.

Whether he had been previously bidden in through Gurney, or whether this chance word constituted his invitation, he did not know. Seeking enlightenment upon the point, he discovered that the critic had disappeared, to furnish his half-column for the morning issue. La Tarantina, hearing his inquiry, gave him the news in her broken English. The dancer, lithe, powerful, with the hideous feet and knotty legs typical of her profession, turned her somber, questioning eyes on the stranger:

"You air Monsieur Ban-kerr, who shoot, n'est-ce-pas?" she inquired.

"My name is Banneker," he replied.

"Weel you be ver' good an' shoot sahmbody for me?"

"With pleasure," he said, laughing; "if you'll plead for me with the jury."

"Zen here he iss." She stretched a long and, as it seemed, blatantly naked arm into a group near by and drew forth the roundish man whom Cressey had pointed out at Marrineal's dinner party. "He would be unfaithful to me, ziss one."

"I? Never!" denied the accused. He set a kiss in the hollow of the dancer's wrist. "How d'ye do, Mr. Banneker," he added, holding out his hand. "My name is Eyre."

"But yess!" cried the dancer. "He—what you say it?—he r-r-r-rave over Miss R-r-raleigh. He make me jealous. He shall be shoot at sunrice an' I weel console me wiz his shooter."

"Charming programme!" commented the doomed man. It struck Banneker that he had probably been drinking a good deal, also that he was a very likeable person, indeed. "If you don't mind my asking, where the devil did you learn to shoot like that?"

"Oh, out West where I came from. I used to practice on the pine trees at a little water-tank station called Manzanita".

"Manzanita!" repeated the other. "By God!" He swore softly, and stared at the other.

Banneker was annoyed. Evidently the gossip of which Io's girl friend had hinted that other night at Sherry's had obtained wide currency. Before the conversation could go any further, even had it been likely to after that surprising check, one of the actors came over. He played the part of an ex-cowboy, who, in the bar-room scene, shot his way out of danger through a circle of gang-men, and he was now seeking from Banneker ostensibly pointers, actually praise.

"Say, old man," he began without introduction. "Gimme a tip or two. How do you get your hand over for your gun without giving yourself away?"

"Just dive for it, as you do in the play. You do it plenty quick enough. You'd get the drop on me ten times out of ten," returned Banneker pleasantly, leaving the gratified actor with the conviction that he had been talking with the coming dramatic critic of the age.

For upwards of an hour there was carnival on the dismantling stage, mingled with the hurried toil of scene-shifters and the clean-up gang. Then the impromptu party began to disperse, Eyre going away with the dancer, after coming to bid Banneker good-night, with a look of veiled curiosity and interest which its object could not interpret. Banneker was gathered into the *corps intime* of Miss Raleigh's supper party, including the author of the play, an elderly first-nighter, two or three dramatic critics, Marrineal, who had drifted in, late, and half a dozen of the company. The men outnumbered the women, as is usual in such affairs, and Banneker found himself seated between the playwright and a handsome, silent girl who played with distinction the part of an elderly woman. There was wine in profusion, but he noticed that the player-folk drank sparingly. Condition, he correctly surmised, was part of their stock in trade. As it should be part of his also.

Late in the supper's course, there was a shifting of seats, and he was landed next to the star.

"I suppose you're bored stiff with talking about the shooting," she said, at once.

"I am, rather. Wouldn't you be?"

"I? Publicity is the breath of life to us," she laughed. "You deal in it, so you don't care for it."

"That's rather shrewd in you. I'm not sure that the logic is sound."

"Anyway, I'm not going to bore you with your fame. But I want you to do something for me."

"It is done," he said solemnly.

"How prettily you pay compliments! There is to be a police investigation, isn't there?"

"Probably."

"Could you get me in?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Then I want to come when you're on the stand."

"Great goodness! Why?"

"Why, if you want a reason," she answered mischievously, "say that I want to bring good luck to your *première*, as you brought it to mine."

"I'll probably make a sorry showing. Perhaps you would give me some training."

She answered in kind, and the acquaintanceship was progressing most favorably when a messenger of the theater manager's office staff appeared with early editions of the morning papers. Instantly every other interest was submerged.

"Give me The Ledger," demanded Betty. "I want to see what Gurney says."

"Something pleasant surely," said Banneker. "He told me that the play was an assured success."

As she read, Betty's vivacious face sparkled. Presently her expression changed. She uttered a little cry of disgust and rage.

"What's the matter?" inquired the author.

"Gurney is up to his smartnesses again," she replied. "Listen. Isn't this enraging!" She read:

As for the play itself, it is formed, fashioned, and finished in the cleverest style of tailor-made, to Miss Raleigh's charming personality. One must hail Mr. Laurence as chief of our sartorial playwrights. No actress ever boasted a neater fit. Can you not picture him, all nice little enthusiasms and dainty devices, bustling about his fair patroness, tape in hand, mouth bristling with pins, smoothing out a wrinkle here, adjusting a line there, achieving his little *chef d'œuvre* of perfect tailoring? We have had playwrights who were blacksmiths, playwrights who were costumers, playwrights who were musical-boxes, playwrights who were, if I may be pardoned, garbage incinerators. It remained, for Mr. Laurence to show us what can be done with scissors, needle, and a nice taste in frills.

"I think it's mean and shameful!" proclaimed the reader in generous rage.

"But he gives you a splendid send-off, Miss Raleigh," said her leading man, who, reading over her shoulder, had discovered that he, too, was handsomely treated.

"I don't care if he does!" cried Betty. "He's a pig!"

Her manager, possessed of a second copy of The Ledger, now made a weighty contribution to the discussion. "Just the same, this'll help sell out the house. It's full of stuff we can lift to paper the town with."

He indicated several lines heartily praising Miss Raleigh and the cast, and one which, wrenched from its satirical context, was made to give an equally favorable opinion of the play. Something of Banneker's astonishment at this cavalier procedure must have been reflected in his face, for Marrineal, opposite, turned to him with a look of amusement.

"What's your view of that, Mr. Banneker?"

"Mine?" said Banneker promptly. "I think it's crooked. What's yours?"

"Still quick on the trigger," murmured the other, but did not answer the return query.

Replies in profusion came from the rest, however. "It isn't any crookeder than the review." — "D' you call that fair criticism!"—"Gurney! He hasn't an honest hair in his head."—"Every other critic is strong for it; this is the only knock."—"What did Laurence ever do to Gurney?"

Out of the welter of angry voices came Betty Raleigh's clear speech, addressed to Banneker.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Banneker; I'd forgotten that The Ledger is your paper."

"Oh, The Ledger ain't any worse than the rest of 'em, take it day in and day out," the manager remarked, busily penciling apposite texts for advertising, on the margin of Gurney's critique.

"It isn't fair," continued the star. "A man spends a year working over a play — it was more than a year on this, wasn't it, Denny?" she broke off to ask the author.

Laurence nodded. He looked tired and a little bored, Banneker thought.

"And a critic has a happy thought and five minutes to think it over, and writes something mean and cruel and facetious, and perhaps undoes a whole year's work. Is that right?"

"They ought to bar him from the theater," declared one of the women in the cast.

"And what do you think of *that?*" inquired Marrineal, still addressing Banneker.

Banneker laughed. "Admit only those who wear the bright and burnished badge of the Booster," he said. "Is that the idea?"

"Nobody objects to honest criticism," began Betty Raleigh heatedly, and was interrupted by a mild but sardonic "Hear! Hear!" from one of the magazine reviewers.

"Honest players don't object to honest criticism, then," she amended. "It's the unfairness that hurts."

"All of which appears to be based on the assumption that it is impossible for Mr. Gurney honestly to have disliked Mr. Laurence's play," pointed out Banneker. "Now, delightful as it seemed to me, I can conceive that to other minds —"

"Of course he could honestly dislike it," put in the playwright hastily. "It isn't that."

"It's the mean, slurring way he treated it," said the star. "Mr. Banneker, just what did he say to you about it?"

Swiftly there leapt to his recollection the critic's words, at the close of the second act. "It's a relief to listen for once to a

comedy that is sincere and direct." . . . Then why, why — "He said that you were all that the play required and the play was all that you required," he answered, which was also true, but another part of the truth. He was not minded to betray his associate.

"He's rotten," murmured the manager, now busy on the margin of another paper. "But I dunno as he's any rottener than the rest."

"On behalf of the profession of journalism, we thank you, Bezdek," said one of the critics.

"Don't mind old Bez," put in the elderly first-nighter. "He always says what he thinks he means, but he usually doesn't mean it."

"That is perhaps just as well," said Banneker quite quietly, "if he means that The Ledger is not straight."

"I didn't say The Ledger. I said Gurney. He's crooked as a corkscrew's hole."

There was a murmur of protest and apprehension, for this was going rather too far, which Banneker's voice stilled. "Just a minute. By that you mean that he takes bribes?"

"Naw!" snorted Bezdek.

"That he's influenced by favoritism, then?"

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"You've said either too little or too much."

"I can clear this up, I think," proffered the elderly first-nighter, in his courteous voice. "Mr. Gurney is perhaps more the writer than the critic. He is carried away by the felicitous phrase."

"He'd rather be funny than fair," said Miss Raleigh bluntly.

"The curse of dramatic criticism," murmured a magazine representative.

"Rotten," said Bezdek doggedly. "Crooked. Tryin' to be funny at other folks' expense. *I'll* give his tail a twist!" By which he meant Mr. Gurney's printed words.

"Apropos of the high cult of honesty," remarked Banneker.

"The curse of all journalism," put in Laurence. "The temptation to be effective at the expense of honesty."

"And what do you think of *that*?" inquired the cheerful Marrineal, still directing his query to Banneker.

"I think it's rather a large order. Why do you keep asking my opinion?"

"Because I suspect that you still bring a fresh mind to bear on these matters."

Banneker rose, and bade Betty Raleigh good-night. She retained his hand in hers, looking up at him with a glint of anxiety in her weary, childlike eyes. "Don't mind what we've said," she appealed to him. "We're all a little above ourselves. It's always so after an opening."

"I don't mind at all," he returned gravely: "unless it's true."

"Ah, it's true right enough," she answered dispiritedly. "Don't forget about the investigation. And don't let them dare to put you on on a matinée day."

Betty Raleigh was a conspicuous figure, at not one but half a dozen sessions of the investigation, which wound through an accelerating and sensational course, with Banneker as the chief figure. He was an extraordinary witness, ready, self-possessed, good-humored under the heckling of the politician lawyer who had claimed and received the right to appear, on the ground that his police clients might be summoned later on a criminal charge.

Before the proceedings were over, a complete overturn in the city government was foreshadowed, and it became evident that Judge Enderby might either head the movement as its candidate, or control it as its leader. Nobody, however, knew what he wished or intended politically. Every now and again in the progress of the hearings, Banneker would surprise on the lawyer's face an expression which sent his memory questing fruitlessly for determination of that elusive likeness, flickering dimly in the past.

Banneker's own rôle in the investigation kept him in the headlines; at times put him on the front page. Even The Ledger could only minimize, not suppress, his dominating and picturesque part.

But there was another and less pleasant sequel to the shooting, in its effect upon the office status. Though he was a "spaceman" now, dependent for his earnings upon the number of columns weekly which he had in the paper, and ostensibly equipped to handle matter of importance, a long succession of the

pettiest kind of assignments was doled out to him by the city desk: obituary notices of insignificant people, small police items, tipsters' yarns, routine jobs such as ship news, police headquarters substitution, even the minor courts usually relegated to the fifteen or twenty-dollar-a-week men. Or, worst and most grinding ordeal of a reporter's life, he was kept idle at his desk, like a misbehaving boy after school, when all the other men had been sent out. One week his total space came to but twenty-eight dollars odd. What this meant was plain enough; he was being disciplined for his part in the investigation.

Out of the open West which, under the rigor of the game, keeps its temper and its poise, Banneker had brought the knack of setting his teeth and smiling so serenely that one never even perceived the teeth to be set behind the smile. This ability stood him in good stead now. In his time of enforced leisure he bethought himself of the sketches which Miss Westlake had typed. With his just and keen perception, he judged them not to be magazine matter. But they might do as "Sunday stuff." He turned in half a dozen of them to Mr. Homans. When next he saw them they were lying, in uncorrected proof, on the managing editor's desk while Mr. Gordon gently rapped his knuckles over them.

"Where did you get the idea for these, Mr. Banneker?" he asked.

"I don't know. It came to me."

"Would you care to sign them?"

"Sign them?" repeated the reporter in surprise, for this was a distinction afforded to only a choice few on the conservative Ledger.

"Yes. I'm going to run them on the editorial page. Do us some more and keep them within the three-quarters. What's your full name?"

"I'd like to sign them 'Eban,' answered the other, after some thought. "And thank you."

Assignments or no assignments, thereafter Banneker was able to fill his idle time. Made adventurous by the success of the "Vagrancies," he next tried his hand at editorials on light or

picturesque topics, and with satisfying though not equal results, for here he occasionally stumbled upon the hard-rooted prejudices of the Inside Office, and beheld his efforts vanish into the irreclaimable limbo of the scrap-basket. Nevertheless, at ten dollars per column for this kind of writing, he continued to make a decent space bill, and clear himself of the doldrums where the waning of the city desk's favor had left him. All that he could now make he needed, for his change of domicile had brought about a corresponding change of habit and expenditure into which he slipped imperceptibly. To live on fifteen dollars a week, plus his own small income, which all went for "extras," had been simple, at Mrs. Brashear's. To live on fifty at the Regalton was much more of a problem. Banneker discovered that he was a natural spender. The discovery caused him neither displeasure nor uneasiness. He confidently purposed to have money to spend; plenty of it, as a mere, necessary concomitant to other things that he was after. Good reporters on space, working moderately, made from sixty to seventy-five dollars a week. Banneker set himself a mark of a hundred dollars. He intended to work very hard. . . if Mr. Greenough would give him a chance.

Mr. Greenough's distribution of the day's news continued to be distinctly unfavorable to the new space-man. The better men on the staff began to comment on the city desk's discrimination. Banneker had, for a time, shone in heroic light: his feat had been honorable, not only to The Ledger office, but to the entire craft of reporting. In the investigation he had borne himself with unexceptionable modesty and equanimity. That he should be "picked on" offended that generous *esprit de corps* which was natural to the office. Tommy Burt was all for referring the matter to Mr. Gordon.

"You mind your own business, Tommy," said Banneker placidly. "Our friend the Joss will stick his foot into a gopher hole yet."

The assignment that afforded Banneker his chance was of the most unpromising. An old builder, something of a local character over in the Corlears Hook vicinity, had died. The Ledger, Mr. Greenough informed Banneker, in his dry, polite manner, wanted

"a sufficient obit" of the deceased. Banneker went to the queer, decrepit frame cottage at the address given, and there found a group of old Sam Corpenshire's congeners, in solemn conclave over the dead. They welcomed the reporter, and gave him a ceremonial drink of whiskey, highly superior whiskey. They were glad that he had come to write of their dead friend. If ever a man deserved a good write-up, it was Sam Corpenshire. From one mouth to another they passed the word of his shrewd dealings, of his good-will to his neighbors, of his ripe judgment, of his friendliness to all sound things and sound men, of his shy, sly charities, of the thwarted romance, which, many years before, had left him lonely but unembittered; and out of it Banneker, with pen too slow for his eager will, wove not a two-stick obit, but a rounded column shot through with lights that played upon the little group of characters, the living around the dead, like sunshine upon an ancient garden.

Even Mr. Greenough congratulated Banneker, the next morning. In the afternoon mail came a note from Mr. Gaines of The New Era monthly. That perspicuous editor had instantly identified the style of the article with that of the "Eban" series, part of which he had read in typograph. He wrote briefly but warmly of the work: and would the writer not call and see him soon?

Perhaps the reporter might have accepted the significant invitation promptly, as he at first intended. But on the following morning he found in his box an envelope under French stamp, inscribed with writing which, though he had seen but two specimens of it, drove everything else out of his tumultuous thoughts. He took it, not to his desk, but to a side room of the art department, unoccupied at that hour, and opened it with chilled and fumbling hands.

Within was a newspaper clipping, from a Paris edition of an American daily. It gave a brief outline of the battle on the pier. In pencil on the margin were these words:

> Do you remember practicing, that day, among the pines? I'm so proud!
>
> Io.

He read it again. The last sentence affected him with a sensation of dizziness. Proud! Of his deed! It gave him the feeling that she had reclaimed, reappropriated him. No! That she had never for a moment released him. In a great surge, sweeping through his veins, he felt the pressure of her breast against his, the strong enfoldment of her arms, her breath upon his lips. He tore envelope and clipping into fragments.

By one of those strange associations of linked memory, such as "clangs and flashes for a drowning man," he sharply recalled where he had seen Willis Enderby before. His was the face in the photograph to which Camilla Van Arsdale had turned when death stretched out a hand toward her.

## Chapter X

While the police inquiry was afoot, Banneker was, perforce, often late in reporting for duty, the regular hour being twelve-thirty. Thus the idleness which the city desk had imposed upon him was, in a measure, justified. On a Thursday, when he had been held in conference with Judge Enderby, he did not reach The Ledger office until after two. Mr. Greenough was still out for luncheon. No sooner had Banneker entered the swinging gate than Mallory called to him. On the assistant city editor's face was a peculiar expression, half humorous, half dubious, as he said:

"Mr. Greenough has left an assignment for you."

"All right," said Banneker, stretching out his hand for the clipping or slip. None was forthcoming.

"It's a tip," explained Mallory. "It's from a pretty convincing source. The gist of it is that the Delavan Eyres have separated and a divorce is impending. You know, of course, who the Eyres are."

"I've met Eyre."

"That so? Ever met his wife?"

"No," replied Banneker, in good faith.

"No; you wouldn't have, probably. They travel different paths. Besides, she's been practically living abroad. She's a stunner. It's big society stuff, of course. The best chance of landing the story is from Archie Densmore, her half-brother. The international polo-player, you know. You'll find him at The Retreat, down on the Jersey coast."

The Retreat Banneker had heard of as being a bachelor country club whose distinguishing marks were a rather Spartan athleticism, and a more stiffly hedged exclusiveness than any other social institution known to the *élite* of New York and Philadelphia, between which it stood midway.

"Then I'm to go and ask him," said Banneker slowly, "whether his sister is suing for divorce?"

"Yes," confirmed Mallory, a trifle nervously. "Find out who's to be named, of course. I suppose it's that new dancer, though there have been others. And there was a quaint story about some previous attachment of Mrs. Eyre's: that might have some bearing."

"I'm to ask her brother about that, too?"

"We want the story," answered Mallory, almost petulantly.

On the trip down into Jersey the reporter had plenty of time to consider his unsavory task. Some one had to do this kind of thing, so long as the public snooped and peeped and eavesdropped through the keyhole of print at the pageant of the socially great: this he appreciated and accepted. But he felt that it ought to be some one other than himself — and, at the same time, was sufficiently just to smile at himself for his illogical attitude.

A surprisingly good auto was found in the town of his destination, to speed him to the stone gateway of The Retreat. The guardian, always on duty there, passed him with a civil word, and a sober-liveried flunkey at the clubhouse door, after a swift, unobtrusive consideration of his clothes and bearing, took him readily for granted, and said that Mr. Densmore would be just about going on the polo field for practice. Did the gentleman know his way to the field? Seeing the flag on the stable, Banneker nodded, and walked over. A groom pointed out a spare, powerful looking young man with a pink face, startlingly defined by a straight black mustache and straighter black eyebrows, mounting a light-built roan, a few rods away. Banneker accosted him.

"Yes, my name is Densmore," he answered the visitor's accost.

"I'm a reporter from The Ledger," explained Banneker.

"A reporter?" Mr. Densmore frowned. "Reporters aren't allowed here, except on match days. How did you get in?"

"Nobody stopped me," answered the visitor in an expressionless tone.

"It doesn't matter," said the other, "since you're here. What is it; the international challenge?"

"A rumor has come to us — There's a tip come in at the

office — We understood that there is —" Banneker pulled himself together and put the direct question. "Is Mrs. Delavan Eyre bringing a divorce suit against her husband?"

For a time there was a measured silence. Mr. Densmore's heavy brows seemed to jut outward and downward toward the questioner.

"You came out here from New York to ask me that?" he said presently.

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Who is named as co-respondent? And will there be a defense, or a counter-suit?"

"A counter-suit," repeated the man in the saddle quietly. "I wonder if you realize what you're asking?"

"I'm trying to get the news," said Banneker doggedly striving to hold to an ideal which momentarily grew more sordid and tawdry.

"And I wonder if you realize how you ought to be answered."

Yes; Banneker realized, with a sick realization. But he was not going to admit it. He kept silence.

"If this polo mallet were a whip, now," observed Mr. Densmore meditatively. "A dog-whip, for preference."

Under the shameful threat Banneker's eyes lightened. Here at least was something he could face like a man. His undermining nausea mitigated.

"What then?" he inquired in tones as level as those of his opponent.

"Why, then I'd put a mark on you. A reporter's mark."

"I think not."

"Oh; you think not?" The horseman studied him negligently. Trained to the fineness of steel in the school of gymnasium, field, and tennis court, he failed to recognize in the man before him a type as formidable, in its rugged power, as his own. "Or perhaps I'd have the grooms do it for me, before they threw you over the fence."

"It would be safer," allowed the other, with a smile that surprised the athlete.

"Safer?" he repeated. "I wasn't thinking of safety."

"Think of it," advised the visitor; "for if you set your grooms on me, they could perhaps throw me out. But as sure as they did I'd kill you the next time we met."

Densmore smiled. "You!" he said contemptuously. "Kill, eh? Did you ever kill any one?"

"Yes."

Under their jet brows Densmore's eyes took on a peculiar look of intensity. "A Ledger reporter," he murmured. "See here! Is your name Banneker, by any chance?"

"Yes."

"You're the man who cleared out the wharf-gang

"Yes."

Densmore had been born and brought up in a cult to which courage is the basic, inclusive virtue for mankind, as chastity is for womankind. To his inground prejudice a man who was simply and unaffectedly brave must by that very fact be fine and admirable. And this man had not only shown an iron nerve, but afterward, in the investigation, which Densmore had followed, he had borne himself with the modesty, discretion, and good taste of the instinctive gentleman. The poloist was almost pathetically at a loss. When he spoke again his whole tone and manner had undergone a vital transformation.

"But, good God!" he cried in real distress and bewilderment, "a fellow who could do what you did, stand up to those gun-men in the dark and alone, to be garbaging around asking rotten, prying questions about a man's sister! No! I don't get it."

Banneker felt the blood run up into his face, under the sting of the other's puzzled protest, as it would never have done under open contempt or threat. A miserable, dull hopelessness possessed him. "It's part of the business," he muttered.

"Then it's a rotten business," retorted the horseman. "Do you *have* to do this?"

"Somebody has to get the news."

"News! Scavenger's filth. See here, Banneker, I'm sorry I roughed you about the whip. But, to ask a man questions about the women of his own family — No: I'm *damned* if I get it." He

lost himself in thought, and when he spoke again it was as much to himself as to the man on the ground. "Suppose I did make a frank statement: you can never trust the papers to get it straight, even if they mean to, which is doubtful. And there's Io's name smeared all over — Hel-lo! What's the matter, now?" For his horse had shied away from an involuntary jerk of Banneker's muscles, responsive to electrified nerves, so sharply as to disturb the rider's balance.

"What name did you say?" muttered Banneker, involuntarily.

"Io. My foster-sister's nickname. Irene Welland, she was. You're a queer sort of society reporter if you don't know that."

"I'm not a society reporter."

"But you know Mrs. Eyre?"

"Yes; in a way," returned Banneker, gaining command of himself. "Officially, you might say. She was in a railroad wreck that I stage-managed out West. I was the local agent."

"Then I've heard about you," replied Densmore with interest, though he had heard only what little Io had deemed it advisable that he should know. "You helped my sister when she was hurt. We owe you something for that."

"Official duty."

"That's all right. But it was more than that. I recall your name now." Densmore's bearing had become that of a man to his equal. "I'll tell you; let's go up to the clubhouse and have a drink, shan't we? D' you mind just waiting here while I give this nag a little run to supple him up?"

He was off, leaving Banneker with brain awhirl. To steady himself against this sudden flood of memory and circumstance, Banneker strove to focus his attention upon the technique of the horse and his rider. When they returned he said at once:

"Are you going to play that pony?"

The horseman looked mildly surprised. "After he's learned a bit more. Shapes up well, don't you think?"

"Speed him up to me and give him a sharp twist to the right, will you?"

Accepting the suggestion without comment, Densmore cantered away and brought the roan down at speed. To the rider,

his mount seemed to make the sudden turn perfectly. But Banneker stepped out and examined the off forefoot with a dubious face.

"Breaks a little there," he stated seriously.

The horseman tried the turn again, throwing his weight over. This time he did feel a slightly perceptible "give." "What's the remedy?" he asked.

"Build up the outer flange of the shoe. That may do it. But I shouldn't trust him without a thorough test. A good pony'll always overplay his safety a little in a close match."

The implication of this expert view aroused Densmore's curiosity. "You've played," he said.

"No: I've never played. I've knocked the ball about a little."

"Where?"

"Out in Santa Barbara. With the stable-boys."

So simply was it said that Densmore returned, quite as simply: "Were you a stable-boy?"

"No such luck, then. Just a kid, out of a job."

Densmore dismounted, handed reins and mallet to the visitor and said, "Try a shot or two."

Slipping his coat and waistcoat, Banneker mounted and urged the pony after the ball which the other sent spinning out across the field. He made a fairly creditable cut away to the left, following down and playing back moderately. While his mallet work was, naturally, uncertain, he played with a full, easy swing and in good form. But it was his horsemanship which specially commended itself to the critical eye of the connoisseur.

"Ridden range, haven't you?" inquired the poloist when the other came in.

"Quite a bit of it, in my time."

"Now, I'll tell you," said Densmore, employing his favorite formula. "There'll be practice later. It's an off day and we probably won't have two full teams. Let me rig you out, and you try it."

Banneker shook his head. "I'm here on business. I'm a reporter with a story to get."

"All right; it's up to a reporter to stick until he gets his news,"

agreed the other. "You dismiss your taxi, and stay out here and dine, and I'll run you back to town myself. And at nine o'clock I'll answer your question and answer it straight."

Banneker, gazing longingly at the bright turf of the field, accepted.

Polo is to The Retreat what golf is to the average country club. The news that Archie Densmore had a new player down for a try-out brought to the side-lines a number of the old-time followers of the game, including Poultney Masters, the autocrat of Wall Street and even more of The Retreat, whose stables he, in large measure, supported. In the third period, the stranger went in at Number Three on the pink team. He played rather poorly, but there was that in his style which encouraged the enthusiasts.

"He's material," grunted old Masters, blinking his pendulous eyelids, as Banneker, accepting the challenge of Jim Maitland, captain of the opposing team and roughest of players, for a ride-off, carried his own horse through by sheer adroitness and daring, and left the other rolling on the turf. "Anybody know who he is?"

"Heard Archie call him Banker, I think," answered one of the great man's hangers-on.

Later, Banneker having changed, sat in an angled window of the clubhouse, waiting for his host, who had returned from the stables. A group of members entering the room, and concealed from him by an L, approached the fireplace talking briskly.

"Dick says the feller's a reporter," declared one of them, a middle-aged man named Kirke. "Says he saw him tryin' to interview somebody on the Street, one day."

"Well, I don't believe it," announced an elderly member. "This chap of Densmore's looks like a gentleman and dresses like one. I don't believe he's a reporter. And he rides like a devil."

"*I* say there's ridin' and ridin'," proclaimed Kirke. "Some fellers ride like jockeys; some fellers ride like cowboys; some fellers ride like gentlemen. I say this reporter feller don't ride like a gentleman."

"Oh, slush!" said another discourteously. "What is riding like a gentleman?"

Kirke reverted to the set argument of his type. "I'll betcha a hundred he don't!"

"Who's to settle such a bet?"

"Leave it to Maitland," said somebody.

"I'll leave it to Archie Densmore if you like," offered the bettor belligerently.

"Leave it to Mr. Masters," suggested Kirke.

"Why not leave it to the horse?"

The suggestion, coming in a level and unconcerned tone from the depths of the chair in which Banneker was seated, produced an electrical effect. Banneker spoke only because the elderly member had walked over to the window, and he saw that he must be discovered in another moment. Out of the astonished silence came the elderly member's voice, gentle and firm.

"Are you the visitor we have been so frankly discussing?"

"I assume so."

"Isn't it rather unfortunate that you did not make your presence known sooner?"

"I hoped that I might have a chance to slip out unseen and save you embarrassment."

The other came forward at once with hand outstretched. "My name is Forster," he said. "You're Mr. Banker, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Banneker, shaking hands. For various reasons it did not seem worth while to correct the slight error.

"Look out! Here's the old man," said some one.

Poultney Masters plodded in, his broad paunch shaking with chuckles. "'Leave it to the horse,'" he mumbled appreciatively. "'Leave it to the horse.' It's good. It's damned good. The right answer. Who but the horse should know whether a man rides like a gentleman! Where's young Banneker?"

Forster introduced the two. "You've got the makings of a polo-man in you," decreed the great man. "Where are you playing?"

"I've never really played. Just practiced."

"Then you ought to be with us. Where's Densmore? We'll put you up and have you in by the next meeting."

"A reporter in The Retreat!" protested Kirke who had proffered the bet.

"Why not?" snapped old Poultney Masters. "Got any objections?"

Since the making or marring of his fortunes, like those of hundreds of other men, lay in the pudgy hollow of the financier's hand, poor Kirke had no objections which he could not and did not at once swallow. The subject of the flattering offer had, however.

"I'm much obliged," said he. "But I couldn't join this club. Can't afford it."

"You can't afford not to. It's a chance not many young fellows from nowhere get."

"Perhaps you don't know what a reporter's earnings are, Mr. Masters."

The rest of the group had drifted away, in obedience, Banneker suspected, to some indication given by Masters which he had not perceived.

"You won't be a reporter long. Opportunities will open out for a young fellow of your kind."

"What sort of opportunities?" inquired Banneker curiously.

"Wall Street, for example."

"I don't think I'd like the game. Writing is my line. I'm going to stick to it."

"You're a fool," barked Masters.

"That is a word I don't take from anybody," stated Banneker.

"*You* don't take? Who the — " The raucous snarl broke into laughter, as the other leaned abruptly forward. "Banneker," he said, "have you got *me* covered?"

Banneker laughed, too. Despite his brutal assumption of autocracy, it was impossible not to like this man. "No," he answered. "I didn't expect to be held up here. So I left my gun."

"You did a job on that pier," affirmed the other. "But you're a fool just the same — if you'll take it with a smile."

"I'll think it over," answered Banneker, as Densmore entered.

"Come and see me at the office," invited Masters as he shambled pursily away.

Across the dining-table Densmore said to his guest: "So the Old Boy wants to put you up here."

"Yes."

"That means a sure election."

"But even if I could afford it, I'd get very little use of the club. You see, I have only one day off a week."

"It is a rotten business, for sure!" said Densmore sympathetically. "Couldn't you get on night work, so you could play afternoons?"

"Play polo?" Banneker laughed. "My means would hardly support one pony."

"That'll be all right," returned the other nonchalantly. "There are always fellows glad to lend a mount to a good player. And you're going to be that."

The high lust of the game took and shook Banneker for a dim moment. Then he recovered himself. "No. I couldn't do that."

"Let's leave it this way, then. Whether you join now or not, come down once in a while as my guest, and fill in for the scratch matches. Later you may be able to pick up a few nags, cheap."

"I'll think it over," said Banneker, as he had said to old Poultney Masters.

Not until after the dinner did Banneker remind his host of their understanding. "You haven't forgotten that I'm here on business?"

"No; I haven't. I'm going to answer your question for publication. Mrs. Eyre has not the slightest intention of suing for divorce."

"About the separation?"

"No. No separation, either. Io is traveling with friends and will be back in a few months."

"That is authoritative?"

"You can quote me, if you like, though I'd rather nothing were published, of course. And I give you my personal word that it's true."

"That's quite enough."

"So much for publication. What follows is private: just between you and me."

Banneker nodded. After a ruminative pause Densmore asked an abrupt question.

"You found my sister after the wreck, didn't you?"

"Well; she found me."

"Was she hurt?"

"Yes."

"Badly?"

"I think not. There was some concussion of the brain, I suppose. She was quite dazed."

"Did you call a doctor?"

"No. She wouldn't have one."

"You know Miss Van Arsdale, don't you?"

"She's the best friend I've got in the world," returned Banneker, so impulsively that his interrogator looked at him curiously before continuing:

"Did you see Io at her house?"

"Yes; frequently," replied Banneker, wondering to what this all tended, but resolved to be as frank as was compatible with discretion.

"How did she seem?"

"She was as well off there as she could be anywhere."

"Yes. But how did she seem? Mentally, I mean."

"Oh, that! The dazed condition cleared up at once."

"I wish I were sure that it had ever cleared up," muttered Densmore.

"Why shouldn't you be sure?"

"I'm going to be frank with you because I think you may be able to help me with a clue. Since she came back from the West, Io has been unlike herself. The family has never understood her marriage with Del Eyre. She didn't really care for Del. [To his dismay, Banneker here beheld the glowing tip of his cigar perform sundry involuntary dips and curves. He hoped that his face was under better control.] The marriage was a fizzle. I don't believe it lasted a month, really. Eyre had always been a chaser, though he did straighten out when he married Io. He really was crazy about her; but when she chucked him, he went back to his old hunting grounds. One can understand that. But Io; that's different. She's always played the game before. With Del, I don't think she quite did. She quit: that's the plain fact

of it. Just tired of him. No other cause that I can find. Won't get a divorce. Doesn't want it. So there's no one else in the case. It's queer. It's mighty queer. And I can't help thinking that the old jar to her brain —"

"Have you suggested that to her?" asked Banneker as the other broke off to ruminate mournfully.

"Yes. She only laughed. Then she said that poor old Del wasn't at fault except for marrying her in the face of a warning. I don't know what she meant by it; hanged if I do. But, you see, it's quite true: there'll be no divorce or separation.... You're sure she was quite normal when you last saw her at Miss Van Arsdale's?"

"Absolutely. If you want confirmation, why not write Miss Van Arsdale yourself?"

"No; I hardly think I'll do that.... Now as to that gray you rode, I've got a chance to trade him." And the talk became all of horse, which is exclusive and rejective of other interests, even of women.

Going back in the train, Banneker reviewed the crowding events of the day. At the bottom of his thoughts lay a residue, acid and stinging, the shame of the errand which had taken him to The Retreat, and which the memory of what was no less than a personal triumph could not submerge. That he, Errol Banneker, whose dealings with all men had been on the straight and level status of self-respect, should have taken upon him the ignoble task of prying into intimate affairs, of meekly soliciting the most private information in order that he might make his living out of it — not different in kind from the mendicancy which, even as a hobo, he had scorned — and that, at the end, he should have discerned Io Welland as the object of his scandal-chase; that fermented within him like something turned to foulness.

At the office he reported "no story." Before going home he wrote a note to the city desk.

## Chapter XI

Impenetrability of expression is doubtless a valuable attribute to a joss. Otherwise so many josses would not display it. Upon the stony and placid visage of Mr. Greenough, never more joss-like than when, on the morning after Banneker went to The Retreat, he received the resultant note, the perusal thereof produced no effect. Nor was there anything which might justly be called an expression, discernible between Mr. Greenough's cloven chin-tip and Mr. Greenough's pale fringe of hair, when, as Banneker entered the office at noon, he called the reporter to him. Banneker's face, on the contrary, displayed a quite different impression; that of amiability.

"Nothing in the Eyre story, Mr. Banneker!"

"Not a thing."

"You saw Mr. Densmore?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would he talk?"

"Yes; he made a statement."

"It didn't appear in the paper."

"There was nothing to it but unqualified denial."

"I see; I see. That's all, Mr. Banneker.... Oh, by the way."

Banneker, who had set out for his desk, turned back.

"I had a note from you this morning."

As this statement required no confirmation, Banneker gave it none.

"Containing your resignation."

"Conditional upon my being assigned to pry into society or private scandals or rumors of them."

"The Ledger does not recognize conditional resignation."

"Very well." Banneker's smile was as sunny and untroubled as a baby's.

"I suppose you appreciate that some one must cover this kind of news."

"Yes. It will have to be some one else."

The faintest, fleeting suspicion of a frown troubled the Brahminical calm of Mr. Greenough's brow, only to pass into unwrinkled blandness.

"Further, you will recognize that, for the protection of the paper, I must have at call reporters ready to perform any emergency duty."

"Perfectly," agreed Banneker.

"Mr. Banneker," queried Mr. Greenough in a semi-purr, "are you too good for your job?"

"Certainly."

For once the personification of city-deskness, secure though he was in the justice of his position, was discomfited. "Too good for The Ledger?" he demanded in protest and rebuke.

"Let me put it this way; I'm too good for any job that won't let me look a man square between the eyes when I meet him on it."

"A dull lot of newspapers we'd have if all reporters took that view," muttered Mr. Greenough.

"It strikes me that what you've just said is the severest kind of an indictment of the whole business, then," retorted Banneker.

"A business that is good enough for a good many first-class men, even though you may not consider it so for you. Possibly being for the time — for a brief time — a sort of public figure, yourself, has — "

"Nothing at all to do with it," interrupted the urbane reporter. "I've always been this way. It was born in me."

"I shall consult with Mr. Gordon about this," said Mr. Greenough, becoming joss-like again. "I hardly think —" But what it was that he hardly thought, the subject of his animadversions did not then or subsequently ascertain, for he was dismissed in the middle of the sentence with a slow, complacent nod.

Loss of his place, had it promptly followed, would not have dismayed the rebel. It did not follow. Nothing followed. Nothing, that is, out of the ordinary run. Mr. Gordon said no word. Mr. Greenough made no reference to the resignation. Tommy Burt, to whom Banneker had confided his action, was of opinion that the city desk was merely waiting "to hand you something

so raw that you'll have to buck it; something that not even Joe Bullen would take." Joe Bullen, an undertaker's assistant who had drifted into journalism through being a tipster, was The Ledger's "keyhole reporter" (unofficial).

"The joss is just tricky enough for that," said Tommy. "He'll want to put you in the wrong with Gordon. You're a pet of the boss's."

"Don't blame Greenough," said Banneker. "If you were on the desk you wouldn't want reporters that wouldn't take orders."

Van Cleve, oldest in standing of any of the staff, approached Banneker with a grave face and solemn warnings. To leave The Ledger was to depart forever from the odor of journalistic sanctity. No other office in town was endurable for a gentleman. Other editors treated their men like muckers. The worst assignment given out from The Ledger desk was a perfumed cinch in comparison with what the average city room dealt out. And he gave a formidable sketch of the careers (invariably downhill) of reckless souls who had forsaken the true light of The Ledger for the false lures which led into outer and unfathomable darkness. By this system of subtly threatened excommunication had The Ledger saved to itself many a good man who might otherwise have gone farther and not necessarily fared worse. Banneker was not frightened. But he did give more than a thought to the considerate standards and generous comradeship of the office. Only — was it worth the price in occasional humiliation?

Sitting, idle at his desk in one of the subsequent periods of penance, he bethought him of the note on the stationery of The New Era Magazine, signed, "Yours very truly, Richard W. Gaines." Perhaps this was opportunity beckoning. He would go to see the Great Gaines.

The Great Gaines received him with quiet courtesy. He was a stubby, thick, bearded man who produced an instant effect of entire candor. So peculiar and exotic was this quality that it seemed to set him apart from the genus of humankind in an aura of alien and daunting honesty. Banneker recalled hearing of outrageous franknesses from his lips, directed upon small and great, and, most amazingly, accepted without offense, because of the

translucent purity of the medium through which, as it were, the inner prophet had spoken. Besides, he was usually right.

His first words to Banneker, after his greeting, were: "You are exceedingly well tailored."

"Does it matter?" asked Banneker, smiling.

"I'm disappointed. I had read into your writing midnight toil and respectable, if seedy, self-support."

"After the best Grub Street tradition? Park Row has outlived that."

"I know your tailor, but what's your college?" inquired this surprising man.

Banneker shook his head.

"At least I was right in that. I surmised individual education. Who taught you to think for yourself?"

"My father."

"It's an uncommon name. You're not a son of Christian Banneker, perhaps?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"A mistaken man. Whoring after strange gods. Strange, sterile, and disappointing. But a brave soul, nevertheless. Yes; I knew him well. What did he teach you?"

"He tried to teach me to stand on my own feet and see with my own eyes and think for myself."

"Ah, yes! With one's own eyes. So much depends upon whither one turns them.... What have you seen in daily journalism?"

"A chance. Possibly a great chance."

"To think for yourself?"

Banneker started, at this ready application of his words to the problem which was already outlining itself by small, daily limnings in his mind.

"To write for others what you think for yourself?" pursued the editor, giving sharpness and definition to the outline.

"Or," concluded Mr. Gaines, as his hearer preserved silence, "eventually to write for others what they think for themselves?" He smiled luminously. "It's a problem in stress: $x$ = the breaking-point of honesty. Your father was an absurdly honest man. Those of us who knew him best honored him."

"Are you doubting my honesty?" inquired Banneker, without resentment or challenge.

"Why, yes. Anybody's. But hopefully, you understand."

"Or the honesty of the newspaper business?"

A sigh ruffled the closer tendrils of Mr. Gaines's beard. "I have never been a journalist in the Park Row sense," he said regretfully. "Therefore I am conscious of solutions of continuity in my views. Park Row amazes me. It also appalls me. The daily stench that arises from the printing-presses. Two clouds; morning and evening....Perhaps it is only the odor of the fertilizing agent, stimulating the growth of ideas. Or is it sheer corruption?"

"Two stages of the same process, aren't they?" suggested Banneker.

"Encouraging to think so. Yet labor in a fertilizing plant, though perhaps essential, is hardly conducive to higher thinking. You like it?"

"I don't accept your definition at all," replied Banneker. "The newspapers are only a medium. If there is a stench, they do not originate it. They simply report the events of the day."

"Exactly. They simply disseminate it."

Banneker was annoyed at himself for flushing. "They disseminate news. We've got to have news, to carry on the world. Only a small fraction of it is — well, malodorous. Would you destroy the whole system because of one flaw? You're not fair."

"Fair? Of course I'm not. How should I be? No; I would not destroy the system. Merely deodorize it a bit. But I suppose the public likes the odors. It sniffs 'em up like — like Cyrano in the bake-shop. A marvelous institution, the public which you and I serve. Have you ever thought of magazine work, Mr. Banneker?"

"A little."

"There might be a considerable future there for you. I say 'might.' Nothing is more uncertain. But you have certain — er — stigmata of the writer — That article, now, about the funereal eulogies over the old builder; did you report that talk as it was?"

"Approximately."

"How approximately?"

"Well; the basic idea was there. The old fellows gave me that, and I fitted it up with talk. Surely there's nothing dishonest in that," protested Banneker.

"Surely not," agreed the other. "You gave the essence of the thing. That is a higher veracity than any literal reporting which would be dull and unreadable. I thought I recognized the fictional quality in the dialogue."

"But it wasn't fiction," denied Banneker eagerly.

The Great Gaines gave forth one of his oracles. "But it was. Good dialogue is talk as it should be talked, just as good fiction is life as it should be lived — logically and consecutively. Why don't you try something for The New Era?"

"I have."

"When?"

"Before I got your note."

"It never reached me."

"It never reached anybody. It's in my desk, ripening."

"Send it along, green, won't you? It may give more indications that way. And first work is likely to be valuable chiefly as indication."

"I'll mail it to you. Before I go, would you mind telling me more definitely why you advise me against the newspaper business?"

"I advise? I never advise as to questions of morals or ethics. I have too much concern with keeping my own straight."

"Then it *is* a question of morals?"

"Or ethics. I think so. For example, have you tried your hand at editorials?"

"Yes."

"Successfully?"

"As far as I've gone."

"Then you are in accord with the editorial policy of The Ledger?"

"Not in everything."

"In its underlying, unexpressed, and immanent theory that this country can best be managed by an aristocracy, a chosen few, working under the guise of democracy?"

"No; I don't believe that, of course."

"I do, as it happens. But I fail to see how Christian Banneker's son and *élève* could. Yet you write editorials for The Ledger."

"Not on those topics."

"Have you never had your editorials altered or cut or amended, in such manner as to give a side-slant toward the paper's editorial fetiches?"

Again and most uncomfortably Banneker felt his color change. "Yes; I have," he admitted.

"What did you do?"

"What could I do? The Chief controls the editorial page."

"You might have stopped writing for it."

"I needed the money. No; that isn't true. More than the money, I wanted the practice and the knowledge that I could write editorials if I wished to."

"Are you thinking of going on the editorial side?"

"God forbid!" cried Banneker.

"Unwilling to deal in other men's ideas, eh? Well, Mr. Banneker, you have plenty of troubles before you. Interesting ones, however."

"How much could I make by magazine writing?" asked Banneker abruptly.

"Heaven alone knows. Less than you need, I should say, at first. How much do you need?"

"My space bill last week was one hundred and twenty-one dollars. I filled 'em up on Sunday specials."

"And you need that?"

"It's all gone," grinned Banneker boyishly.

"As between a safe one hundred dollars-plus, and a highly speculative nothing-and-upwards, how could any prudent person waver?" queried Mr. Gaines as he shook hands in farewell.

For the first time in the whole unusual interview, Banneker found himself misliking the other's tone, particularly in the light emphasis placed upon the word prudent. Banneker did not conceive kindly of himself as a prudent person.

Back at the office, Banneker got out the story of which he had

spoken to Mr. Gaines, and read it over. It seemed to him good, and quite in the tradition of The New Era. It was polite, polished, discreet, and, if not precisely subtle, it dealt with interests and motives lying below the obvious surfaces of life. It had amused Banneker to write it; which is not to say that he spared laborious and conscientious effort. The New Era itself amused him, with its air of well-bred aloofness from the flatulent romanticism which filled the more popular magazines of the day with duke-like drummers or drummer-like dukes, amiable criminals and brisk young business geniuses, possessed of rather less moral sense than the criminals, for its heroes, and for its heroines a welter of adjectives exhaling an essence of sex. Banneker could imagine one of these females straying into Mr. Gaines's editorial ken, and that gentleman's bland greeting as to his own sprightly second maid arrayed and perfumed, unexpectedly encountered at a charity bazar. Too rarefied for Banneker's healthy and virile young tastes, the atmosphere in which The New Era lived and moved and had its consistently successful editorial being! He preferred a freer air to the mild scents of lavender and rose-ash, even though it might blow roughly at times. Nevertheless, that which was fine and fastidious in his mind recognized and admired the restraint, the dignity, the high and honorably maintained standards of the monthly. It had distinction. It stood apart from and consciously above the reading mob. In some respects it was the antithesis of that success for which Park Row strove and sweated.

Banneker felt that he, too, could claim a place on those heights. Yes; he liked his story. He thought that Mr. Gaines would like it. Having mailed it, he went to Katie's to dinner. There he found Russell Edmonds discussing his absurdly insufficient pipe with his customary air of careworn watchfulness lest it go out and leave him forlorn and unsolaced in a harsh world. The veteran turned upon the newcomer a grim twinkle.

"Don't you do it," he advised positively.

"Do what?"

"Quit."

"Who told you I was considering it?"

"Nobody. I knew it was about time for you to reach that point. We all do — at certain times."

"Why?"

"Disenchantment. Disillusionment. Besides, I hear the city desk has been horsing you."

"Then some one *has* been blabbing."

"Oh, those things ooze out. Can't keep 'em in. Besides, all city desks do that to cubs who come up too fast. It's part of the discipline. Like hazing."

"There are some things a man can't do," said Banneker with a sort of appeal in his voice.

"Nothing," returned Edmonds positively. "Nothing he can't do to get the news."

"Did you ever peep through a keyhole?"

"Figuratively speaking?"

"If you like. Either way."

"Yes."

"Would you do it to-day?"

"No."

"Then it's a phase a reporter has to go through?"

"Or quit."

"You haven't quit?"

"I did. For a time. In a way. I went to jail."

"Jail? You?" Banneker had a flash of intuition. "I'll bet it was for something you were proud of."

"I wasn't ashamed of the jail sentence, at any rate. Youngster, I'm going to tell you about this." Edmonds's fine eyes seemed to have receded into their hollows as he sat thinking with his pipe neglected on the table. "D' you know who Marna Corcoran was?"

"An actress, wasn't she?"

"Leading lady at the old Coliseum Theater. A good actress and a good woman. I was a cub then on The Sphere under Red McGraw, the worst gutter-pup that ever sat at a city desk, and a damned good newspaper man. In those days The Sphere specialized on scandals; the rottener, the better; stuff that it wouldn't touch to-day. Well, a hell-cat of a society woman sued

her husband for divorce and named Miss Corcoran. Pure viciousness, it was. There wasn't a shadow of proof, or even suspicion."

"I remember something about that case. The woman withdrew the charge, didn't she?"

"When it was too late. Red McGraw had an early tip and sent me to interview Marna Corcoran. He let me know pretty plainly that my job depended on my landing the story. That was his style; a bully. Well, I got the interview; never mind how. When I left her home Miss Corcoran was in a nervous collapse. I reported to McGraw. 'Keno!' says he. 'Give us a column and a half of it. Spice it.' I spiced it — I guess. They tel. me it was a good job. I got lost in the excitement of writing and forgot what I was dealing with, a woman. We had a beat on that interview. They raised my salary, I remember. A week later Red called me to the desk. 'Got another story for you, Edmonds. A hummer. Marna Corcoran is in a private sanitarium up in Connecticut; hopelessly insane. I wouldn't wonder if our story did it.' He grinned like an ape. 'Go up there and get it. Buy your way in, if necessary. You can always get to some of the attendants with a ten-spot. Find out what she raves about; whether it's about Allison. Perhaps she's given herself away. Give us another red-hot one on it. Here's the address.'

"I wadded up the paper and stuffed it in his mouth. His lips felt pulpy. He hit me with a lead paper-weight and cut my head open. I don't know that I even hit him; I didn't specially want to hit him. I wanted to mark him. There was an extra-size open ink-well on his desk. I poured that over him and rubbed it into his face. Some of it got into his eyes. How he yelled! Of course he had me arrested. I didn't make any defense; I couldn't without bringing in Marna Corcoran's name. The Judge thought *I* was crazy. I was, pretty near. Three months, he gave me. When I came out Marna Corcoran was dead. I went to find Red McGraw and kill him. He was gone. I think he suspected what I would do. I've never set eyes on him since. Two local newspapers sent for me as soon as my term was up and offered me jobs. I thought it was because of what I had done to McGraw. It wasn't. It was on the strength of the Marna Corcoran interview."

"Good God!"

"I needed a job, too. But I didn't take either of those. Later I got a better one with a decent newspaper. The managing editor said when he took me on: 'Mr. Edmonds, we don't approve of assaults on the city desk. But if you ever receive in this office an assignment of the kind that caused your outbreak, you may take it out on me.' There are pretty fine people in the newspaper business, too."

Edmonds retrieved his pipe, discovering with a look of reproach and dismay that it was out. He wiped away some tiny drops of sweat which had come out upon the grayish skin beneath his eyes, while he was recounting his tragedy.

"That makes my troubles seem petty," said Banneker, under his breath. "I wonder —"

"You wonder why I told you all this," supplemented the veteran. "Since I have, I'll tell you the rest; how I made atonement in a way. Ten years ago I was on a city desk myself. Not very long; but long enough to find I didn't like it. A story came to me through peculiar channels. It was a scandal story; one of those things that New York society whispers about all over the place, yet it's almost impossible to get anything to go on. When I tell you that even The Searchlight, which lives on scandal, kept off it, you can judge how dangerous it was. Well; I had it pat. It was really big stuff of its kind. The woman was brilliant, a daughter of one of the oldest and most noted New York families; and noted in her own right. She had never married: preferred to follow her career. The man was eminent in his line: not a society figure, except by marriage — his wife was active in the Four Hundred — because he had no tastes in that direction. He was nearly twenty years senior to the girl. The affair was desperate from the first. How far it went is doubtful; my informant gave it the worst complexion. Certainly there must have been compromising circumstances, for the wife left him, holding over him the threat of exposure. He cared nothing for himself; and the girl would have given up everything for him. But he was then engaged on a public work of importance; exposure meant the ruin of that. The wife made conditions; that

the man should neither speak to, see, nor communicate with the girl. He refused. The girl went into exile and forced him to make the agreement. My informant had a copy of the letter of agreement; you can see how close she was to the family. She said that, if we printed it, the man would instantly break barriers, seek out the girl, and they would go away together. A front-page story, and exclusive."

"So it was a woman who held the key!" exclaimed Banneker.

Edmonds turned on him. "What does that mean? Do you know anything of the story?"

"Not all that you've told me. I know the people."

"Then why did you let me go on?"

"Because they — one of them — is my friend. There is no harm to her in my knowing. It might even be helpful."

"Nevertheless, I think you should have told me at once," grumbled the veteran. "Well, I didn't take the story. The informer said that she would place it elsewhere. I told her that if she did I would publish the whole circumstances of her visit and offer, and make New York too hot to hold her. She retired, bulging with venom like a mad snake. But she dares not tell."

"The man's wife, was it not?"

"Some one representing her, I suspect. A bad woman, that wife. But I saved the girl in memory of Marna Corcoran. Think what the story would be worth, now that the man is coming forward politically!" Edmonds smiled wanly. "It was worth a lot even then, and I threw my paper down on it. Of course I resigned from the city desk at once."

"It's a fascinating game, being on the inside of the big things," ruminated Banneker. "But when it comes to a man's enslaving himself to his paper, I — don't — know."

"No: you won't quit," prophesied the other.

"I have. That is, I've resigned."

"Of course. They all do, of your type. It was the peck of dirt, wasn't it?"

Banneker nodded.

"Gordon won't let you go. And you won't have any more dirt thrown at you — probably. If you do, it'll be time enough then."

"There's more than that."

"Is there? What?"

"We're a pariah caste, Edmonds, we reporters. People look down on us."

"Oh, that be damned! You can't afford to be swayed by the ignorance or snobbery of outsiders. Play the game straight, and let the rest go."

"But we are, aren't we?" persisted Banneker.

"What! Pariahs?" The look which the old-timer bent upon the rising star of the business had in it a quality of brooding and affection. "Son, you're too young to have come properly to that frame of mind. That comes later. With the dregs of disillusion after the sparkle has died out."

"But it's true. You admit it."

"If an outsider said that we were pariahs I'd call him a liar. But, what's the use, with you? It isn't reporting alone. It's the whole business of news-getting and news-presenting; of journalism. We're under suspicion. They're afraid of us. And at the same time they're contemptuous of us."

"Why?"

"Because people are mostly fools and fools are afraid or contemptuous of what they don't understand."

Banneker thought it over. "No. That won't do," he decided. "Men that aren't fools and aren't afraid distrust us and despise the business. Edmonds, there's nothing wrong, essentially, in furnishing news for the public. It's part of the spread of truth. It's the handing on of the light. It's — it's as big a thing as religion, isn't it?"

"Bigger. Religion, seven days a week."

"Well, then —"

"I know, son," said Edmonds gently. "You're thirsting for the clear and restoring doctrine of journalism. And I'm going to give you hell's own heresy. You'll come to it anyway, in time." His fierce little pipe glowed upward upon his knotted brows. "You talk about truth, news: news and truth as one and the same thing. So they are. But newspapers aren't after news: not primarily. Can't you see that?"

"No. What are they after?"

"Sensation."

Banneker turned the word over in his mind, evoking confirmation in the remembered headlines even of the reputable Ledger.

"Sensation," repeated the other. "We've got the speed-up motto in industry. Our newspaper version of it is 'spice-up.' A conference that may change the map of Europe will be crowded off any front page any day by young Mrs. Poultney Masters making a speech in favor of giving girls night-keys, or of some empty-headed society dame being caught in a roadhouse with another lady's hubby. Spice: that's what we're looking for. Something to tickle their jaded palates. And they despise us when we break our necks or our hearts to get it for 'em."

"But if it's what they want, the fault lies with the public, not with us," argued Banneker.

"I used to know a white-stuff man — a cocaine-seller — who had the same argument down pat," retorted Edmonds quietly.

Banneker digested that for a time before continuing.

"Besides, you imply that because news is sensational, it must be unworthy. That isn't fair. Big news is always sensational. And of course the public wants sensation. After all, sensation of one sort or another is the proof of life."

"Hence the noble profession of the pander," observed Edmonds through a coil of minute and ascending smoke-rings. "He also serves the public."

"You're not drawing a parallel —"

"Oh, no! It isn't the same thing, quite. But it's the same public. Let me tell you something to remember, youngster. The men who go to the top in journalism, the big men of power and success and grasp, come through with a contempt for the public which they serve, compared to which the contempt of the public for the newspaper is as skim milk to corrosive sublimate."

"Perhaps that's what is wrong with the business, then."

"Have you any idea," inquired Edmonds softly, "what the philosophy of the Most Ancient Profession is?"

Banneker shook his head.

"I once heard a street-walker on the verge of D. T.'s — she

was intelligent; most of 'em are fools — express her analytical opinion of the men who patronized her. The men who make our news system have much the same notion of their public. How much poison *they* scatter abroad we won't know until a later diagnosis."

"Yet you advise me to stick in the business."

"You've got to. You are marked for it."

"And help scatter the poison!"

"God forbid! I've been pointing out the disease of the business. There's a lot of health in it yet. But it's got to have new blood. I'm too old to do more than help a little. Son, you've got the stuff in you to do the trick. Some one is going to make a newspaper here in this rotten, stink-breathing, sensation-sniffing town that'll be based on news. Truth! There's your religion for you. Go to it."

"And serve a public that I'll despise as soon as I get strong enough to disregard it's contempt for me," smiled Banneker.

"You'll find a public that you can't afford to despise," retorted the veteran. "There is such a public. It's waiting."

"Well; I'll know in a couple of weeks," said Banneker. "But *I* think I'm about through."

For Edmonds's bitter wisdom had gone far toward confirming his resolution to follow up his first incursion into the magazine field if it met with the success which he confidently expected of it.

As if to hold him to his first allegiance, the ruling spirits of The Ledger now began to make things easy for him. Fat assignments came his way again. Events which seemed almost made to order for his pen were turned over to him by the city desk. Even though he found little time for Sunday "specials," his space ran from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a day, and the "Eban" skits on the editorial page, now paid at double rates because of their popularity, added a pleasant surplus. To put a point to his mysteriously restored favor, Mr. Greenough called up one hot morning and asked Banneker to make what speed he could to Sippiac, New Jersey. Rioting had broken out between mill-guards and the strikers of the International Cloth Company factories, with a number of resulting fatalities. It was a "big

story." That Banneker was specially fitted, through his familiarity with the ground, to handle it, the city editor was not, of course, aware.

At Sippiac, Banneker found the typical industrial tragedy of that time and condition, worked out to its logical conclusion. On the one side a small army of hired gun-men, assured of full protection and endorsement in whatever they might do: on the other a mob of assorted foreigners, ignorant, resentful of the law, which seemed only a huge mechanism of injustice manipulated by their oppressors, inflamed by the heavy potations of a festal night carried over into the next day, and, because of the criminally lax enforcement of the law, tacitly permitted to go armed. Who had started the clash was uncertain and, perhaps in essentials, immaterial; so perfectly and fatefully had the stage been set for mutual murder. At the close of the fray there were ten dead. One was a guard: the rest, strikers or their dependents, including a woman and a six-year-old child, both shot down while running away.

By five o'clock that afternoon Banneker was in the train returning to the city with a board across his knees, writing. Five hours later his account was finished. At the end of his work, he had one of those ideas for "pointing" a story, mere commonplaces of journalism nowadays, which later were to give him his editorial reputation. In the pride of his publicity-loving soul, Mr. Horace Vanney, chief owner of the International Cloth Mills, had given to Banneker a reprint of an address by himself, before some philosophical and inquiring society, wherein he had set forth some of his simpler economic theories. A quotation, admirably apropos to Banneker's present purposes, flashed forth clear and pregnant, to his journalistic memory. From the Ledger "morgue" he selected one of several cuts of Mr. Vanney, and turned it in to the night desk for publication, with this descriptive note:

Horace Vanney, Chairman of the Board of the International Cloth Company, who declares that if working-women are paid more than a bare living wage, the surplus goes into finery and vanities which tempt them to ruin. Mr. Vanney's mills pay girls four dollars a week.

Ravenously hungry, Banneker went out to order a long-delayed dinner at Katie's. Hardly had he swallowed his first mouthful of soup, when an office boy appeared.

"Mr. Gordon wants to know if you can come back to the office at once."

On the theory that two minutes, while important to his stomach, would not greatly matter to the managing editor, Banneker consumed the rest of his soup and returned. He found Mr. Gordon visibly disturbed.

"Sit down, Mr. Banneker," he said.

Banneker compiled.

"We can't use that Sippiac story."

Banneker sat silent and attentive.

"Why did you write it that way?"

"I wrote it as I got it."

"It is not a fair story."

"Every fact —"

"It is a most unfair story."

"Do you know Sippiac, Mr. Gordon?" inquired Banneker equably.

"I do not. Nor can I believe it possible that you could acquire the knowledge of it implied in your article, in a few hours."

"I spent some time investigating conditions there before I came on the paper."

Mr. Gordon was taken aback. Shifting his stylus to his left hand, he assailed severally the knuckles of his right therewith before he spoke. "You know the principles of The Ledger, Mr. Banneker."

"To get the facts and print them, so I have understood."

"These are not facts." The managing editor rapped sharply upon the proof. "This is editorial matter, hardly disguised."

"Descriptive, I should call it," returned the writer amiably.

"Editorial. You have pictured Sippiac as a hell on earth."

"It is."

"Sentimentalism!" snapped the other. His heavy visage wore a disturbed and peevish expression that rendered it quite plaintive. "You have been with us long enough, Mr. Banneker,

to know that we do not cater to the uplift-social trade, nor are we after the labor vote."

"Yes, sir. I understand that."

"Yet you present here, what is, in effect, a damning indictment of the Sippiac Mills."

"The facts do that; not I."

"But you have selected your facts, cleverly — oh, very cleverly — to produce that effect, while ignoring facts on the other side."

"Such as?"

"Such as the presence and influence of agitators. The evening editions have the names, and some of the speeches."

"That is merely clouding the main issue. Conditions are such there that no outside agitation is necessary to make trouble."

"But the agitators are there. They're an element and you have ignored it. Mr. Banneker, do you consider that you are dealing fairly with this paper, in attempting to commit it to an inflammatory, pro-strike course?"

"Certainly, if the facts constitute that kind of an argument."

"What of that picture of Horace Vanney? Is that news?"

"Why not? It goes to the root of the whole trouble."

"To print that kind of stuff," said Mr. Gordon forcibly, "would make The Ledger a betrayer of its own cause. What you personally believe is not the point."

"I believe in facts."

"It is what The Ledger believes that is important here. You must appreciate that, as long as you remain on the staff, your only honorable course is to conform to the standards of the paper. When you write an article, it appears to our public, not as what Mr. Banneker says, but as what The Ledger says."

"In other words," said Banneker thoughtfully, "where the facts conflict with The Ledger's theories, I'm expected to adjust the facts. Is that it?"

"Certainly not! You are expected to present the news fairly and without editorial emphasis."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gordon, but I don't believe I could rewrite

that story so as to give a favorable slant to the International's side. Shooting down women and kids, you know —"

Mr. Gordon's voice was crisp as he cut in. "There is no question of your rewriting it. That has been turned over to a man we can trust."

"To handle facts tactfully," put in Banneker in his mildest voice.

Considerably to his surprise, he saw a smile spread over Mr. Gordon's face. "You're an obstinate young animal, Banneker," he said. "Take this proof home, put it under your pillow and dream over it. Tell me a week from now what you think of it."

Banneker rose. "Then, I'm not fired?" he said.

"Not by me."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm trusting in your essential honesty to bring you around."

"To be quite frank," returned Banneker after a moment's thought, "I'm afraid I've got to be convinced of The Ledger's essential honesty to come around."

"Go home and think it over," suggested the managing editor.

To his associate, Andreas, he said, looking at Banneker's retreating back: "We're going to lose that young man, Andy. And we can't afford to lose him."

"What's the matter?" inquired Andreas, the fanatical devotee of the creed of news for news' sake.

"Quixotism. Did you read his story?"

"Yes."

Mr. Gordon looked up from his inflamed knuckles for an opinion.

"A great job," pronounced Andreas, almost reverently.

"But not for us."

"No; no. Not for us."

"It wasn't a fair story," alleged the managing editor with a hint of the defensive in his voice.

"Too hot for that," the assistant supported his chief. "And yet perhaps —"

"Perhaps what?" inquired Mr. Gordon with roving and anxious eye.

"Nothing," said Andreas.

As well as if he had finished, Mr. Gordon supplied the conclusion. "Perhaps it is quite as fair as our recast article will be."

It was, on the whole, fairer.

## Chapter XII

Sound though Mr. Gordon's suggestion was, Banneker after the interview did not go home to think it over. He went to a telephone booth and called up the Avon Theater. Was the curtain down? It was, just. Could he speak to Miss Raleigh? The affair was managed.

"Hello, Bettina."

"Hello, Ban."

"How nearly dressed are you?"

"Oh — half an hour or so."

"Go out for a bite, if I come up there?"

The telephone receiver gave a transferred effect of conscientious consideration. "No: I don't think so. I'm tired. This is my night for sleep."

To such a basis had the two young people come in the course of the police investigation and afterward, that an agreement had been formulated whereby Banneker was privileged to call up the youthful star at any reasonable hour and for any reasonable project, which she might accept or reject without the burden of excuse.

"Oh, all right!" returned Banneker amiably.

The receiver produced, in some occult manner, the manner of not being precisely pleased with this. "You don't seem much disappointed," it said.

"I'm stricken but philosophical. Don't you see me, pierced to the heart, but —"

"Ban," interrupted the instrument: "you're flippant. Have you been drinking?"

"No. Nor eating either, now that you remind me."

"Has something happened?"

"Something is always happening in this restless world."

"It has. And you want to tell me about it."

"No. I just want to forget it, in your company."

"Is it a decent night out?"

"Most respectable."

"Then you may come and walk me home. I think the air will do me good."

"It's very light diet, though," observed Banneker.

"Oh, very well," responded the telephone in tones of patient resignation. "I'll watch you eat. Good-bye."

Seated at a quiet table in the restaurant, Betty Raleigh leaned back in her chair, turning expectant eyes upon her companion.

"Now tell your aged maiden auntie all about it."

"Did I say I was going to tell you about it?"

"You said you weren't. Therefore I wish to know."

"I think I'm fired."

"Fired? From The Ledger? Do you care?"

"For the loss of the job? Not a hoot. Otherwise I wouldn't be going to fire myself."

"Oh: that's it, is it?"

"Yes. You see, it's a question of my doing my work my way or The Ledger's way. I prefer my way."

"And The Ledger prefers its way, I suppose. That's because what you call *your* work, The Ledger considers *its* work."

"In other words, as a working entity, I belong to The Ledger."

"Well, don't you?"

"It isn't a flattering thought. And if the paper wants me to falsify or suppress or distort, I have to do it. Is that the idea?"

"Unless you're big enough not to."

"Being big enough means getting out, doesn't it?"

"Or making yourself so indispensable that you can do things your own way."

"You're a wise child, Betty," said he. "What do you really think of the newspaper business?"

"It's a rotten business."

"That's frank, anyway."

"Now I've hurt your feelings. Haven't I?"

"Not a bit. Roused my curiosity: that's all. Why do you think it a rotten business?"

"It's so — so mean. It's petty."

"As for example?" he pressed.

"See what Gurney did to me — to the play," she replied naïvely. "Just to be smart."

"Whew! Talk about the feminine propensity for proving a generalization by a specific instance! Gurney is an old man reared in an old tradition. He isn't metropolitan journalism."

"He's dramatic criticism," she retorted.

"No. Only one phase of it."

"Anyway, a successful phase."

"He wants to produce his little sensation," ruminated Banneker, recalling Edmonds's bitter diagnosis. "He does it by being clever. There are worse ways, I suppose."

"He'd always rather say a clever thing than a true one."

Banneker gave her a quick look. "Is that the disease from which the newspaper business is suffering?"

"I suppose so. Anyway, it's no good for you, Ban, if it won't let you be yourself. And write as you think. This isn't new to me. I've known newspaper men before, a lot of them, and all kinds."

"Weren't any of them honest?"

"Lots. But very few of them independent. They can't be. Not even the owners, though they think they are."

"I'd like to try that."

"You'd only have a hundred thousand bosses instead of one," said she wisely.

"You're talking about the public. They're your bosses, too, aren't they?"

"Oh, I'm only a woman. It doesn't matter. Besides, they're not. I lead 'em by the ear — the big, red, floppy ear. Poor dears! They think I love 'em all."

"Whereas what you really love is the power within yourself to please them. You call it art, I suppose."

"Ban! What a repulsive way to put it. You're revenging yourself for what I said about the newspapers."

"Not exactly. I'm drawing the deadly parallel."

She drew down her pretty brows in thought. "I see. But, at worst, I'm interpreting in my own way. Not somebody else's."

"Not your author's?"

"Certainly not," she returned mutinously. "I know how to put a line over better than he possibly could. That's *my* business."

"I'd hate to write a play for you, Bettina."

"Try it," she challenged. "But don't try to teach me how to play it after it's written."

"I begin to see the effect of the bill-board's printing the star's name in letters two feet high and the playwright's in one-inch type."

"The newspapers don't print yours at all, do they? Unless you shoot some one," she added maliciously.

"True enough. But I don't think I'd shine as a playwright."

"What will you do, then, if you fire yourself?"

"Fiction, perhaps. It's slow but glorious, I understand. When I'm starving in a garret, awaiting fame with the pious and cocksure confidence of genius, will you guarantee to invite me to a square meal once a fortnight? Think what it would give me to look forward to!"

She was looking him in the face with an expression of frank curiosity. "Ban, does money never trouble you?"

"Not very much," he confessed. "It comes somehow and goes every way."

"You give the effect of spending it with graceful ease. Have you got much?"

"A little dribble of an income of my own. I make, I suppose, about a quarter of what your salary is."

"One doesn't readily imagine you ever being scrimped. You give the effect of pros — no, not of prosperity; of — well — absolute ease. It's quite different."

"Much nicer."

"Do you know what they call you, around town?"

"Didn't know I had attained the pinnacle of being called anything, around town."

"They call you the best-dressed first-nighter in New York."

"Oh, damn!" said Banneker fervently.

"That's fame, though. I know plenty of men who would give half of their remaining hairs for it."

"I don't need the hairs, but they can have it."

"Then, too, you know, I'm an asset."

"An asset?"

"Yes. To you, I mean." She pursed her fingers upon the tip of her firm little chin and leaned forward. "Our being seen so much together. Of course, that's a brashly shameless thing to say. But I never have to wear a mask for you. In that way you're a comfortable person."

"You do have to furnish a diagram, though."

"Yes? You're not usually stupid. Whether you try for it or not — and I think there's a dash of the theatrical in your make-up — you're a picturesque sort of animal. And I — well, I help out the picture; make you the more conspicuous. It isn't your good looks alone — you're handsome as the devil, you know, Ban," she twinkled at him — "nor the super-tailored effect which you pretend to despise, nor your fame as a gun-man, though that helps a lot.... I'll give you a bit of tea-talk: two flappers at The Plaza. 'Who's that wonderful-looking man over by the palm?' — 'Don't you know him? Why, that's Mr. Banneker.' — 'Who's he; and what does he do? Have I seen him on the stage?' — 'No, indeed! I don't know what he does; but he's an ex-ranchman and he held off a gang of river-pirates on a yacht, all alone, and killed eight or ten of them. Doesn't he look it!'"

"I don't go to afternoon teas," said the subject of this sprightly sketch, sulkily.

"You will! If you don't look out. Now the same scene several years hence. Same flapper, answering same question: 'Who's Banneker? Oh, a reporter or something, on one of the papers.' *Et voilà tout!*"

"Suppose you were with me at the Plaza, as an asset, several years hence?"

"I shouldn't be — several years hence."

Banneker smiled radiantly. "Which I am to take as fair warning that, unless I rise above my present lowly estate, that waxing young star, Miss Raleigh, will no longer —"

"Ban! What right have you to think me a wretched little snob?"

"None in the world. It's I that am the snob, for even thinking about it. Just the same, what you said about 'only a reporter or something' struck in."

"But in a few years from now you won't be a reporter."

"Shall I still be privileged to invite Miss Raleigh to supper — or was it tea?"

"You're still angry. That isn't fair of you when I'm being so frank. I'm going to be even franker. I'm feeling that way to-night. Comes of being tired, I suppose. Relaxing of the what-you-callems of inhibition. Do you know there's a lot of gossip about us, back of stage?"

"Is there? Do you mind it?"

"No. It doesn't matter. They think I'm crazy about you." Her clear, steady eyes did not change expression or direction.

"You're not; are you?"

"No; I'm not. That's the strange part of it."

"Thanks for the flattering implication. But you couldn't take any serious interest in a mere reporter, could you?" he said wickedly.

This time Betty laughed. "Couldn't I! I could take serious interest in a tumblebug, at times. Other times I wouldn't care if the whole race of men were extinct — and that's most times. I feel your charm. And I like to be with you. You rest me. You're an asset, too, in a way, Ban; because you're never seen with any woman. You're supposed not to care for them.... You've never tried to make love to me even the least little bit, Ban. I wonder why."

"That sounds like an invitation, but —"

"But you know it isn't. That's the delightful part of you; you do know things like that."

"Also I know better than to risk my peace of mind."

"Don't lie to me, my dear," she said softly. "There's some one else."

He made no reply.

"You see; you don't deny it." Had he denied it, she would have said: "Of course you'd deny it!" the methods of feminine detective logic being so devised.

"No; I don't deny it."

"But you don't want to talk about her."

"No."

"It's as bad as that?" she commiserated gently. "Poor Ban! But you're young. You'll get over it." Her brooding eyes suddenly widened. "Or perhaps you won't," she amended with deeper perceptiveness. "Have you been trying me as an anodyne?" she demanded sternly.

Banneker had the grace to blush. Instantly she rippled into laughter.

"I've never seen you at a loss before. You look as sheepish as a stage-door Johnnie when his inamorata gets into the other fellow's car. Ban, you never hung about stage-doors, did you? I think it would be good for you; tame your proud spirit and all that. Why don't you write one of your 'Eban' sketches on John H. Stage-Door?"

"I'll do better than that. Give me of your wisdom on the subject and I'll write an interview with you for Tittle-Tattle."

"Do! And make me awfully clever, please. Our press-agent hasn't put anything over for weeks. He's got a starving wife and seven drunken children, or something like that, and, as he'll take all the credit for the interview and even claim that he wrote it unless you sign it, perhaps it'll get him a raise and he can then buy the girl who plays the manicure part a bunch of orchids. *He*'d have been a stage-door Johnnie if he hadn't stubbed his toe and become a press-agent."

"All right," said Banneker. "Now: I'll ask the stupid questions and you give the cutie answers."

It was two o'clock when Miss Betty Raleigh, having seen the gist of all her witty and profound observations upon a strange species embodied in three or four scrawled notes on the back of a menu, rose and observed that, whereas acting was her favorite pastime, her real and serious business was sleep. At her door she held her face up to him as straightforwardly as a child. "Good luck to you, dear boy," she said softly. "If I ever were a fortune-teller, I would say that your star was for happiness and success."

He bent and kissed her cheek lightly. "I'll have my try at success," he said. "But the other isn't so easy."

"You'll find them one and the same," was her parting prophecy.

Inured to work at all hours, Banneker went to the small, bare room in his apartment which he kept as a study, and sat down to write the interview. Angles of dawn-light had begun to irradiate the steep canyon of the street by the time he had finished. He read it over and found it good, for its purposes. Every line of it sparkled. It had the effervescent quality which the reading public loves to associate with stage life and stage people. Beyond that, nothing. Banneker mailed it to Miss Westlake for typing, had a bath, and went to bed. At noon he was at The Ledger office, fresh, alert, and dispassionately curious to ascertain the next resolution of the mix-up between the paper and himself.

Nothing happened; at least, nothing indicative. Mr. Greenough's expression was as flat and neutral as the desk over which he presided as he called Banneker's name and said to him:

"Mr. Horace Vanney wishes to relieve his soul of some priceless information. Will you call at his office at two-thirty?"

It was Mr. Vanney's practice, whenever any of his enterprises appeared in a dubious or unfavorable aspect, immediately to materialize in print on some subject entirely unrelated, preferably an announcement on behalf of one of the charitable or civic organizations which he officially headed. Thus he shone forth as a useful, serviceable, and public-spirited citizen, against whom (such was the inference which the newspaper reader was expected to draw) only malignancy could allege anything injurious. In this instance his offering upon the altar of publicity, carefully typed and mimeographed, had just enough importance to entitle it to a paragraph of courtesy. After it was given out to those who called, Mr. Vanney detained Banneker.

"Have you read the morning papers, Mr. Banneker?"

"Yes. That's my business, Mr. Vanney."

"Then you can see, by the outbreak in Sippiac, to what disastrous results anarchism and fomented discontent lead."

"Depends on the point of view. I believe that, after my visit

to the mills for you, I told you that unless conditions were bettered you'd have another and worse strike. You've got it."

"Fortunately it is under control. The trouble-makers and thugs have been taught a needed lesson."

"Especially the six-year-old trouble-making thug who was shot through the lungs from behind."

Mr. Vanney scowled. "Unfortunate. And the papers laid unnecessary stress upon that. Wholly unnecessary. Most unfair."

"You would hardly accuse The Ledger, at least, of being unfair to the mill interests."

"Yes. The Ledger's handling, while less objectionable than some of the others, was decidedly unfortunate."

Banneker gazed at him in stupefaction. "Mr. Vanney, The Ledger minimized every detail unfavorable to the mills and magnified every one which told against the strikers. It was only its skill that concealed the bias in every paragraph."

"You are not over-loyal to your employer, sir," commented the other severely.

"At least I'm defending the paper against your aspersions," returned Banneker.

"Most unfair," pursued Mr. Vanney. "Why publish such matter at all? It merely stirs up more discontent and excites hostility against the whole industrial system which has made this country great. And I give more copy to the newspaper men than any other public man in New York. It's rank ingratitude, that's what it is." He meditated upon the injurious matter. "I suppose we ought to have advertised," he added pensively. "Then they'd let us alone as they do the big stores."

Banneker left the Vanney offices with a great truth illuminating his brain; to wit, that news, whether presented ingenuously or disingenuously, will always and inevitably be unpopular with those most nearly affected. For while we all read avidly what we can find about the other man's sins and errors, we all hope, for our own, the kindly mantle of silence. And because news always must and will stir hostility, the attitude of a public, any part of which may be its next innocent (or guilty) victim, is instinctively

inimical. Another angle of the pariahdom of those who deal in day-to-day history, for Banneker to ponder.

Feeling a strong desire to get away from the troublous environment of print, Banneker was glad to avail himself of Densmore's invitation to come to The Retreat on the following Monday and try his hand at polo again. This time he played much better, his mallet work in particular being more reliable.

"You ride like an Indian," said Densmore to him after the scratch game, "and you've got no nerves. But I don't see where you got your wrist, except by practice."

"I've had the practice, some time since."

"But if you've only knocked about the field with stable-boys —"

"That's the only play I've ever had. But when I was riding range in the desert, I picked up an old stick and a ball of the owner's, and I've chased that ball over more miles of sand and rubble than you'd care to walk. Cactus plants make very fair goal posts, too; but the sand is tricky going for the ball."

Densmore whistled. "That explains it. Maitland says you'll make the club team in two years. Let us get together and fix you up some ponies," invited Densmore.

Banneker shook his head, but wistfully.

"Until you're making enough to carry your own."

"That might be ten years, in the newspaper business. Or never."

"Then get out of it. Let Old Man Masters find you something in the Street. You could get away with it," persuaded Densmore. "And he'll do anything for a polo-man."

"No, thank you. No paid-athlete job for mine. I'd rather stay a reporter."

"Come into the club, anyway. You can afford that. And at least you can take a mount on your day off."

"I'm thinking of another job where I'll have more time to myself than one day a week," confessed Banneker, having in mind possible magazine work. He thought of the pleasant remoteness of The Retreat. It was expensive; it would involve frequent taxi charges. But, as ever, Banneker had an unreason-

ing faith in a financial providence of supply. "Yes: I'll come in," he said. "That is, if I can get in."

"You'll get in, with Poultney Masters for a backer. Otherwise, I'll tell you frankly, I think your business would keep you out, in spite of your polo."

"Densmore, there's something I've been wanting to put up to you."

Densmore's heavy brows came to attention. "Fire ahead."

"You were ready to beat me up when I came here to ask you certain questions."

"I was. Any fellow would be. You would."

"Perhaps. But suppose, through the work of some other reporter, a divorce story involving the sister and brother-in-law of some chap in your set had appeared in the papers."

"No concern of mine."

"But you'd read it, wouldn't you?"

"Probably."

"And if your paper didn't have it in and another paper did, you'd buy the other paper to find out about it."

"If I was interested in the people, I might."

"Then what kind of a sport are you, when you're keen to read about other people's scandals, but sore on any one who inquires about yours?"

"That's the other fellow's bad luck. If he —"

'You don't get my point. A newspaper is simply a news exchange. If you're ready to read about the affairs of others, you should not resent the activity of the newspaper that attempts to present yours. I'm merely advancing a theory."

"Damned ingenious," admitted the polo-player. "Make a reporter a sort of public agent, eh? Only, you see, he isn't. He hasn't any right to my private affairs."

"Then you shouldn't take advantage of his efforts, as you do when you read about your friends."

"Oh, that's too fine-spun for me. Now, I'll tell you; just because I take a drink at a bar I don't make a pal of the bartender. It comes to about the same thing, I fancy. You're trying to justify your profession. Let me ask *you;* do you feel that you're

within your decent rights when you come to a stranger with such a question as you put up to me?"

"No; I don't," replied Banneker ruefully. "I feel like a man trying to hold up a bigger man with a toy pistol."

"Then you'd better get into some other line."

But whatever hopes Banneker may have had of the magazine line suffered a set-back when, a few days later, he called upon the Great Gaines at his office, and was greeted with a cheery though quizzical smile.

"Yes; I've read it," said the editor at once, not waiting for the question. "It's clever. It's amazingly clever."

"I'm glad you like it," replied Banneker, pleased but not surprised.

Mr. Gaines's expression became one of limpid innocence. "Like it? Did I say I liked it?"

"No; you didn't say so."

"No. As a matter of fact I don't like it. Dear me, no! Not at all. Where did you get the idea?" asked Mr. Gaines abruptly.

"The plot?"

"No; no. Not the plot. The plot is nothing. The idea of choosing such an environment and doing the story in that way."

"From The New Era Magazine."

"I begin to see. You have been studying the magazine."

"Yes. Since I first had the idea of trying to write for it."

"Flattered, indeed!" said Mr. Gaines dryly. "And you modeled yourself upon — what?"

"I wrote the type of story which the magazine runs to."

"Pardon me. You did not. You wrote, if you will forgive me, an imitation of that type. Your story has everything that we strive for except reality."

"You believe that I have deliberately copied —"

"A type, not a story. No; you are not a plagiarist, Mr. Banneker. But you are very thoroughly a journalist."

"Coming from you that can hardly be accounted a compliment."

"Nor is it so intended. But I don't wish you to misconstrue me. You are not a journalist in your style and method; it goes

deeper than that. You are a journalist in your — well, in your approach. 'What the public wants.'"

Inwardly Banneker was raging. The incisive perception stung. But he spoke lightly. "Doesn't The New Era want what its public wants?"

"My dear sir, in the words of a man who ought to have been an editor of to-day, 'The public be damned!' What I looked to you for was not your idea of what somebody else wanted you to write, but your expression of what you yourself want to write. About hoboes. About railroad wrecks. About cowmen or peddlers or waterside toughs or stage-door Johnnies, or ward politicians, or school-teachers, or life. Not pink teas."

"I have read pink-tea stories in your magazine."

"Of course you have. Written by people who could see through the pink to the primary colors underneath. When *you* go to a pink tea, you are pink. Did you ever go to one?"

Still thoroughly angry, Banneker nevertheless laughed. "Then the story is no use?"

"Not to us, certainly. Miss Thornborough almost wept over it. She said that you would undoubtedly sell it to The Bon Vivant and be damned forever."

"Thank her on my behalf," returned the other gravely. "If The Bon Vivant wants it and will pay for it, I shall certainly sell it to them."

"Out of pique?...Hold hard, young sir! You can't shoot an editor in his sanctum because of an ill-advised but natural question."

"True enough. Nor do I want — well, yes; I would rather like to."

"Good! That's natural and genuine."

"What do you think The Bon Vivant would pay for that story?" inquired Banneker.

"Perhaps a hundred dollars. Cheap, for a career, isn't it!"

"Isn't the assumption that there is but one pathway to the True Art and but one signboard pointing to it a little excessive?"

"Abominably. There are a thousand pathways, broad and narrow. They all go uphill. . . . Some day when you spin some-

thing out of your own inside, Mr. Banneker, forgive the well-meaning editor and let us see it. It might be pure silk."

All the way downtown, Banneker cursed inwardly but brilliantly. This was his first set-back. Everything prior which he had attempted had been successful. Inevitably the hard, firm texture of his inner endurance had softened under the spoiled-child treatment which the world had readily accorded him. Even while he recognized this, he sulked.

To some extent he was cheered up by a letter from the editor of that lively and not too finicky publication, Tittle-Tattle. The interview with Miss Raleigh was acclaimed with almost rapturous delight. It was precisely the sort of thing wanted. Proof had already been sent to Miss Raleigh, who was equally pleased. Would Mr. Banneker kindly read and revise enclosed proof and return it as soon as possible? Mr. Banneker did better than that. He took back the corrected proof in person. The editor was most cordial, until Banneker inquired what price was to be paid for the interview. Then the editor was surprised and grieved. It appeared that he had not expected to pay anything for it.

"Do you expect to get copy for nothing?" inquired the astonished and annoyed Banneker.

"If it comes to that," retorted the sharp-featured young man at the editorial desk, "you're the one that's getting something for nothing."

"I don't follow you."

"Come off! This is red-hot advertising matter for Betty Raleigh, and you know it. Why, I ought to charge a coupla hundred for running it at all. But you being a newspaper man and the stuff being so snappy, I'm willing to make an exception. Besides, you're a friend of Raleigh's, ain't you? Well — 'nuff said!"

It was upon the tip of Banneker's tongue to demand the copy back. Then he bethought himself of Betty's disappointment. The thing *was* well done. If he had been a thousand miles short of giving even a hint of the real Betty — who was a good deal of a person — at least he had embodied much of the light and

frivolous charm which was her stage stock-in-trade, and what her public wanted. He owed her that much, anyhow.

"All right," he said shortly.

He left, and on the street-car immersed himself in some disillusioning calculations. Suppose he did sell the rejected story to The Bon Vivant. One hundred dollars, he had learned, was the standard price paid by that frugal magazine; that would not recompense him for the time bestowed upon it. He could have made more by writing "specials" for the Sunday paper. And on top of that to find that a really brilliant piece of interviewing had brought him in nothing more substantial than congratulations and the sense of a good turn done for a friend!

The magazine field, he began to suspect, might prove to be arid land.

## Chapter XIII

What next? Banneker put the query to himself with more seriousness than he had hitherto given to estimating the future. Money, as he told Betty Raleigh, had never concerned him much. His start at fifteen dollars a week had been more than he expected; and though his one weekly evening of mild sybaritism ate up all his margin, and his successful sartorial experiments consumed his private surplus, he had no cause for worry, since his salary had been shortly increased to twenty, and even more shortly thereafter to twenty-five. Now it was a poor week in which he did not exceed the hundred. All of it went, rather more fluently than had the original fifteen. Frugal though he could be in normal expenditures, the rental of his little but fashionably situated apartment, his new club expenses, his polo outfit, and his occasional associations with the after-theater clique, which centered at The Avon, caused the debit column to mount with astonishing facility. Furthermore, through his Western associations he had an opportunity to pick up two half-broken polo ponies at bargain prices. He had practically decided to buy them. Their keep would be a serious item. He must have more money.

How to get it? Harder work was the obvious answer. Labor had no terrors for Banneker. Mentally he was a hardened athlete, always in training. Being wise and self-protective, he did no writing on his day off. But except for this period of complete relaxation, he gave himself no respite. Any morning which did not find him writing in his den, after a light, working breakfast, he put in at the Library near by, insatiably reading economics, sociology, politics, science, the more serious magazines, and always the news and comments of the day. He was possessed of an assertive and sane curiosity to know what was going on in the world, an exigence which pressed upon him like a healthy appetite, the stimulus of his hard-trained mental condition. The satisfaction of this demand did not pay an immediate return; he obtained little or no actual material to be transmuted into

the coin of so-much-per-column, except as he came upon suggestions for editorial use; and, since his earlier experience of The Ledger's editorial method with contributions (which he considered light-fingered), he had forsworn this medium. Notwithstanding this, he wrote or sketched out many an editorial which would have astonished, and some which would have benefited, the Inside Room where the presiding genius, malicious and scholarly, dipped his pen alternately into luminous ether and undiluted venom. Some day, Banneker was sure, he himself was going to say things editorially.

His opinion of the editorial output in general was unflattering. It seemed to him bound by formalism and incredibly blind to the immense and vivid interest of the news whereby it was surrounded, as if a man, set down in a meadow full of deep and clear springs, should elect to drink from a shallow, torpid, and muddy trickle. Legislation, taxes, transportation problems, the Greatness of Our City, our National Duty (whatever it might be at the time — and according to opinion), the drink question, the race problem, labor and capital; these were the reiterated topics, dealt with informatively often, sometimes wittily, seldom impartially. But, at best, this was but the creaking mechanism of the artificial structure of society, and it was varied only by an occasional literary or artistic sally, or a preachment in the terms of a convinced moralization upon the unvarying text that the wages of sin is death. Why not a touch of humanism, now and again, thought Banneker, following the inevitable parallels in paper after paper; a ray of light striking through into the life-texture beneath?

By way of experiment he watched the tide of readers, flowing through the newspaper room of the Public Library, to ascertain what they read. Not one in thirty paid any attention to the editorial pages. Essaying farther afield, he attended church on several occasions. His suspicions were confirmed; from the pulpit he heard, addressed to scanty congregations, the same carefully phrased, strictly correct comments, now dealing, however, with the mechanism of another world. The chief point of difference was that the newspaper editorials were, on the whole, more

felicitously worded and more compactly thought out. Essentially, however, the two ran parallel.

Banneker wondered whether the editorial rostrum, too, was fated to deliver its would-be authoritative message to an audience which threatened to dwindle to the vanishing point. Who read those carefully wrought columns in The Ledger? Pot-bellied chair-warmers in clubs; hastening business men appreciative of the daily assurance that stability is the primal and final blessing, discontent the cardinal sin, the extant system perfect and holy, and any change a wile of the forces of destruction — as if the human race had evoluted by the power of standing still! For the man in the street they held no message. No; nor for the woman in the home. Banneker thought of young Smith of the yacht and the coming millions, with a newspaper waiting to drop into his hands. He wished he could have that newspaper — any newspaper, for a year. He'd make the man in the street sit up and read his editorials. Yes, and the woman in the home. Why not the boy and the girl in school, also? Any writer, really master of his pen, ought to be able to make even a problem in algebra editorially interesting!

And if he could make it interesting, he could make it pay.... But how was he to profit by all this hard work, this conscientious technical training to which he was devoting himself? True, it was improving his style. But for the purposes of Ledger reporting, he wrote quite well enough. Betterment here might be artistically satisfactory; financially it would be fruitless. Already his space bills were the largest, consistently, on the staff, due chiefly to his indefatigable industry in devoting every spare office hour to writing his "Eban" sketches, now paid at sixteen dollars a column, and Sunday "specials." He might push this up a little, but not much.

From the magazine field, expectations were meager in the immediate sense. True, The Bon Vivant had accepted the story which The Era rejected; but it had paid only seventy-five dollars. Banneker did not care to go farther on that path. Aside from the unsatisfactory return, his fastidiousness revolted from being identified with the output of a third-class and flashy publi-

cation. Whatever The Ledger's shortcomings, it at least stood first in its field. But was there any future for him there, other than as a conspicuously well-paid reporter? In spite of the critical situation which his story of the Sippiac riots had brought about, he knew that he was safe as long as he wished to stay.

"You're too valuable to lose," said Tommy Burt, swinging his pudgy legs over Banneker's desk, having finished one of his mirthful stories of a row between a wine agent and a theatrical manager over a doubly reserved table in a conspicuous restaurant. "Otherwise — phutt! But they'll be very careful what kind of assignments they hand over to your reckless hands in future. You mustn't throw expensive and brittle conventions at the editor's head. They smash."

"And the fragments come back and cut. I know. But what does it all lead to, Tommy?"

"Depends on which way you're going."

"To the top, naturally."

"From anybody else that would sound blatant, Ban," returned Tommy admiringly. "Somehow you get away with it. Are you as sincere as you act?"

"In so far as my intentions go. Of course, I may trip up and break myself in two."

"No. You'll always fall light. There's a buoyancy about you....But what about coming to the end of the path and finding nowhere else to proceed?"

"Paragon of wisdom, you have stated the situation. Now produce the answer."

"More money?" inquired Tommy.

"More money. More opportunity."

"Then you've got to aim at the executive end. Begin by taking a copy-desk."

"At forty a week?"

"It isn't so long ago that twenty-five looked pretty big to you, Ban."

"A couple of centuries ago," stated Banneker positively. "Forty a week wouldn't keep me alive now."

"You could write a lot of specials. Or do outside work."

"Perhaps. But what would a desk lead to?

"City editor. Night city editor. Night editor. Managing editor at fifteen thou."

"After ten years. If one has the patience. I haven't. Besides, what chance would *I* have?'

"None, with the present lot in the Inside Room. You're a heretic. You're unsound. You've got dangerous ideas — accent on the dangerous. I doubt if they'd even trust you with a blue pencil. You might inject something radical into a thirty-head."

"Tommy," said Banneker, "I'm still new at this game. What becomes of star reporters?"

"Drink," replied Tommy brusquely.

"Rats!" retorted Banneker. "That's guff. There aren't three heavy drinkers in this office."

"A lot of the best men go that way," persisted Burt. "It's the late hours and the irregular life, I suppose. Some drift out into other lines. This office has trained a lot of playwrights and authors and ad-men."

"But some must stick."

"They play out early. The game is too hard. They get to be hacks. *Or* permanent desk-men. D'you know Philander Akely?"

"Who is he?"

'Ask me who he *was* and I'll tell you. He was the brilliant youngster, the coruscating firework, the — the Banneker of ten years ago. Come into the den and meet him."

In one of the inner rooms Banneker was introduced to a fragile, desiccated-looking man languidly engaged in scissoring newspaper after newspaper which he took from a pile and cast upon the floor after operation. The clippings he filed in envelopes. A checkerboard lay on the table beside him.

"Do you play draughts, Mr. Banneker?" he asked in a rumbling bass.

"Very little and very poorly."

The other sighed. "It is pure logic, in the form of contest. Far more so than chess, which is merely sustained effort of concentration. Are you interested in emblemology?"

"I'm afraid I know almost nothing of it," confessed Banneker.

Akely sighed again, gave Banneker a glance which proclaimed an utter lack of interest, and plunged his shears into the editorial vitals of the Springfield Republican. Tommy Burt led the surprised Banneker away.

"Dried up, played out, and given a measly thirty-five a week as hopper-feeder for the editorial room," he announced. "And he was the star man of his time."

"That's pretty rotten treatment for him, then," said Banneker indignantly.

"Not a bit of it. He isn't worth what he gets. Most offices would have chucked him out on the street."

"What was his trouble?"

"Nothing in particular. Just wore his machine out. Everything going out, nothing coming in. He spun out enough high-class copy to keep the ordinary reporter going for a life-time; but he spun it out too fast. Nothing left. The tragedy of it is that he's quite happy."

"Then it isn't a tragedy at all."

"Depends on whether you take the Christian or the Buddhist point of view. He's found his Nirvana in checker problems and collecting literature about insignia. Write? I don't suppose he'd want to if he could. 'There but for the grace of God goes'—you or I. *I* think the *facilis descensus* to the gutter is almost preferable."

"So you've shown him to me as a dreadful warning, have you, Tommy?" mused Banneker aloud.

"Get out of it, Ban; get out of it."

"Why don't you get out of it yourself?"

"Inertia. Or cowardice. And then, I haven't come to the turning-point yet. When I do reach it, perhaps it'll be too late."

"What do you reckon the turning-point?"

"As long as you feel the excitement of the game," explained this veteran of thirty, "you're all right. That will keep you going; the sense of adventure, of change, of being in the thick of things. But there's an underlying monotony, so they tell me: the monotony of seeing things by glimpses, of never really com-

pleting a job, of being inside important things, but never of them. That gets into your veins like a clogging poison. Then you're through. Quit it, Ban, before it's too late."

"No. I'm not going to quit the game. It's my game. I'm going to beat it."

"Maybe. You've got the brains. But I think you're too stiff in the backbone. Go-to-hell-if-you-don't-like-the-way-I-do-it may be all right for a hundred-dollar-a-week job; but it doesn't get you a managing editorship at fifteen to twenty thousand. Even if it did, you'd give up the go-to-hell attitude as soon as you landed, for fear it would cost you your job and be too dear a luxury."

"All right, Mr. Walpole," laughed Banneker. "When I find what my price is, I'll let you know. Meantime I'll think over your well-meant advice."

If the normal way of advancement were closed to him in The Ledger office because of his unsound and rebellious attitude on social and labor questions, there might be better opportunities in other offices, Banneker reflected.

Before taking any step he decided to talk over the general situation with that experienced campaigner, Russell Edmonds. Him and his diminutive pipe he found at Katie's, after most of the diners had left. The veteran nodded when Banneker told him of his having reached what appeared to be a *cul-de-sac*.

"It's about time you quit," said Edmonds vigorously.

"You've changed your mind?"

The elder nodded between two spirals of smoke which gave him the appearance of an important godling delivering oracles through incense. "That was a dam' bad story you wrote of the Sippiac killings."

"I didn't write it."

"Didn't uh? You were there."

"My story went to the office cat."

"What was the stuff they printed? Amalgamated Wire Association?"

"No. Machine-made re-write in the office."

"It wasn't dishonest. The Ledger's too clever for that. It was

unhonest. You can't be both neutral and fair on cold-blooded murder."

"You weren't precisely neutral in The Courier."

Edmonds chuckled. "I did rather put it over on the paper. But that was easy. Simply a matter of lining up the facts in logical sequence."

"Horace Vanney says you're an anarchist."

"It's mutual. I think he's one. To hell with all laws and rights that discommode *Me* and *My* interests. That's the Vanney platform."

"He thinks he ought to have advertised."

"Wise guy! So he ought."

"To secure immunity?"

It required six long, hard puffs to elicit from Edmonds the opinion: "He'd have got it. Partly. Not all he paid for."

"Not from The Ledger," said Banneker jealously. "We're independent in that respect."

Edmonds laughed. "You don't have to bribe your own heeler. The Ledger believes in Vanney's kind of anarchism, as in a religion."

"Could he have bought off The Courier?"

"Nothing as raw as that. But it's quite possible that if the Sippiac Mills had been a heavy advertiser, the paper wouldn't have sent me to the riots. Some one more sympathetic, maybe."

"Didn't they kick on your story?"

"Who? The mill people? Howled!"

"But it didn't get them anything?"

'Didn't it! You know how difficult it is to get anything for publication out of old Rockface Enderby. Well, I had a brilliant idea that this was something he'd talk about. Law Enforcement stuff, you know. And he did. Gave me a hummer of an interview. Tore the guts out of the mill-owners for violating all sorts of laws, and put it up that the mill-guards were themselves a lawless organization. There's nothing timid about Enderby. Why, we'd have started a controversy that would be going yet."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"Interview was killed," replied Edmonds, grinning ruefully.

"For the best interests of the paper. That's what the Vanney crowd's kick got them."

"Pop, what do you make of Willis Enderby?"

"Oh, he's plodding along only a couple of decades behind his time."

"A reactionary?"

"Didn't I say he was plodding along? A reactionary is immovable except in the wrong direction. Enderby's a conservative."

"As a socialist you're against any one who isn't as radical as you are."

"I'm not against Willis Enderby. I'm for him," grunted the veteran.

"Why; if he's a conservative?"

"Oh, as for that, I can bring a long indictment against him. He's a firm believer in the capitalistic system. He's enslaved to the old economic theories, supply and demand, and all that rubbish from the ruins of ancient Rome. He believes that gold is the only sound material for pillars of society. The aristocratic idea is in his bones." Edmonds, by a feat of virtuosity, sent a thin, straight column of smoke, as it might have been an allegorical and sardonic pillar itself, almost to the ceiling. "But he believes in fair play. Free speech. Open field. The rigor of the game. He's a sportsman in life and affairs. That's why he's dangerous."

"Dangerous? To whom?"

"To the established order. To the present system. Why, son, all we Socialists ask is fair play. Give us an even chance for labor, for the proletariat; an even show before the courts, an open forum in the newspapers, the right to organize as capital organizes, and we'll win. If we can't win, we deserve to lose. I say that men like Willis Enderby are our strongest supporters."

"Probably he thinks his side will win, under the strict rules of the game."

"Of course. But if he didn't, he'd still be for fair play, to the last inch."

"That's a pretty fine thing to say of a man, Pop."

"It's a pretty fine man," said Edmonds.

"What does Enderby want? What is he after?"

"For himself? Nothing. It's something to be known as the ablest honest lawyer in New York. Or, you can turn it around and say he's the honestest able lawyer in New York. I think, myself, you wouldn't be far astray if you said the ablest and honestest. No; he doesn't want anything more than what he's got: his position, his money, his reputation. Why should he? But it's going to be forced on him one of these days."

"Politically?"

"Yes. Whatever there is of leadership in the reform element here centers in him. It's only a question of time when he'll have to carry the standard."

"I'd like to be able to fall in behind him when the time comes."

"On The Ledger?" grunted Edmonds.

"But I shan't be on The Ledger when the time comes. Not if I can find any other place to go."

"Plenty of places," affirmed Edmonds positively.

"Yes; but will they give me the chance I want?"

"Not unless you make it for yourself. But let's canvass 'em. You want a morning paper."

"Yes. Not enough salary in the evening field."

"Well: you've thought of The Sphere first, I suppose."

"Naturally. I like their editorial policy. Their news policy makes me seasick."

"I'm not so strong for the editorials. They're always for reform and never for progress."

"Ah, but that's epigram."

"It's true, nevertheless. The Sphere is always tiptoeing up to the edge of some decisive policy, and then running back in alarm. What of The Observer? They're looking for new blood."

"The Observer! O Lord! Preaches the eternal banalities and believes them the eternal verities."

"Epigram, yourself," grinned Edmonds. "Well, The Monitor?"

"The three-card Monitor, and marked cards at that."

"Yes; you'd have to watch the play. The Graphic then?"

"Nothing but an ornamental ghost. The ghost of a once handsomely kept lady. I don't aspire to write daily epitaphs."

"And The Messenger I suppose you wouldn't even call a kept lady. Too common. Babylonian stuff. But The Express is respectable enough for anybody."

"And conscious of it in every issue. One long and pious scold, after a high-minded, bad-tempered formula of its own."

"Then I'll give you a motto for your Ledger." Edmonds puffed it out enjoyably, decorated with bluish and delicate whorls. "'*Meliora video proboque, deteriora sequor.*'"

"No; I won't have that. The last part will do; we do follow the worser way; but if we see the better, we don't approve it. We don't even recognize it as the better. We're honestly convinced in our advocacy of the devil."

"I don't know that we're honestly convinced of anything on The Courier, except of the desirability of keeping friendly with everybody. But such as we are, we'd grab at you."

"No; thanks, Pop. You yourself are enough in the troubled-water duckling line for one old hen like The Courier."

"Then there remains only The Patriot, friend of the Pee-pul."

"Skimmed scum," was Banneker's prompt definition. "And nothing in the soup underneath."

Ernst, the waiter, scuttled across the floor below, and disappeared back of the L-angle a few feet away.

"Somebody's dining there," remarked Edmonds, "while we've been stripping the character off every paper in the field."

"May it be all the editors and owners in a lump!" said Banneker. "I'm sorry I didn't talk louder. I'm feeling reckless."

"Bad frame of mind for a man seeking a job. By the way, what *are* you out after, exactly? Aiming at the editorial page, aren't you?"

Banneker leaned over the table, his face earnest to the point of somberness. "Pop," he said, "you know I can write."

"You can write like the devil," Edmonds offered up on twin supports of vapor.

"Yes, and I can do more than that. I can think."

"For self, or others?" propounded the veteran.

"I take you. I can think for myself and make it profitable to others, if I can find the chance. Why, Pop, this editorial game is child's play!"

"You've tried it?"

"Experimentally. The opportunities are limitless. I could make people read editorials as eagerly as they read scandal or baseball."

"How?"

"By making them as simple and interesting as scandal or baseball."

"Oh! As easy as that," observed Edmonds scornfully. "High art, son! Nobody's found the way yet. Perhaps, if —"

He stopped, took his pipe from his lips and let his raised eyes level themselves toward the corner of the L where appeared a figure.

"Would you gentlemen mind if I took my coffee with you?" said the newcomer smoothly.

Banneker looked with questioning eyebrows toward Edmonds, who nodded. "Come up and sit down, Mr. Marrineal," invited Banneker, moving his chair to leave a vacancy between himself and his companion.

## Chapter XIV

Tertius C. Marrineal was a man of forty, upon whom the years had laid no bonds. A large fortune, founded by his able but illiterate father in the timber stretches of the Great Lakes region, and spread out into various profitable enterprises of mining, oil, cattle, and milling, provided him with a constantly increasing income which, though no amateur at spending, he could never quite overtake. Like many other hustlers of his day and opportunity, old Steve Marrineal had married a shrewd little shopgirl who had come up with him through the struggle by the slow, patient steps described in many of our most improving biographies. As frequently occurs, though it doesn't get into the biographies, she who had played a helpful rôle in adversity, could not withstand affluence. She bloated physically and mentally, and became the juicy and unsuspecting victim of a horde of parasites and flatterers who swarmed eagerly upon her, as soon as the rough and contemptuous protection of her husband was removed by the hand of a medical prodigy who advertised himself as the discoverer of a new and infallible cure for cancer, and whom Mrs. Marrineal, with an instinctive leaning toward quackery, had forced upon her spouse. Appraising his prospective widow with an accurate eye, the dying man left a testament bestowing the bulk of his fortune upon his son, with a few heavy income-producing properties for Mrs. Marrineal. Tertius Marrineal was devoted to his mother, with a jealous, pitying, and protective affection. This is popularly approved as the infallible mark of a good man. Tertius Marrineal was not a good man.

Nor was there any particular reason why he should be. Boys who have a business pirate for father, and a weak-minded coddler for mother, seldom grow into prize exhibits. Young Marrineal did rather better than might have been expected, thanks to the presence at his birth-cradle of a robust little good-fairy named Self-Preservation, who never gets half the credit given to more picturesque but less important gift-bringers. He grew up with an instinctive sense of when to stop. Sometimes he stopped inop-

portunely. He quit several courses of schooling too soon, because he did not like the unyielding regimen of the institutions. When, a little belated, he contrived to gain entrance to a small, old, and fashionable Eastern college, he was able, or perhaps willing, to go only halfway through his sophomore year. Two years in world travel with a well-accredited tutor seemed to offer an effectual and not too rigorous method of completing the process of mind-formation. Young Marrineal got a great deal out of that trip, though the result should perhaps be set down under the E of Experience rather than that of Erudition. The mentor also acquired experience, but it profited him little, as he died within the year after the completion of the trip, his health having been sacrificed in a too conscientious endeavor to keep even pace with his pupil. Young Marrineal did not suffer in health. He was a robust specimen. Besides, there was his good and protective fairy always ready with the flag of warning at the necessary moment.

Launched into the world after the elder Marrineal's death, Tertius interested himself in sundry of the businesses left by his father. Though they had been carefully devised and surrounded with safeguards, the heir managed to break into and improve several of them. The result was more money. After having gambled with fair luck, played the profuse libertine for a time, tried his hand at yachting, horse-racing, big-game hunting, and even politics, he successively tired of the first three, and was beaten at the last, but retained an unsatisfied hunger for it. To celebrate his fortieth birthday, he had bought a house on the eastern vista of Central Park, and drifted into a rather indeterminate life, identified with no special purpose, occupation, or set. Large though his fortune was, it was too much disseminated and he was too indifferent to it, for him to be conspicuous in the money game which constitutes New York's lists of High Endeavor. His reputation, in the city of careless reckonings, was vague, but just a trifle tarnished; good enough for the casual contacts which had hitherto made up his life, but offering difficulties should he wish to establish himself more firmly.

The best clubs were closed to him; he had reached his possible

summit along that path in achieving membership in the recently and superbly established Oligarchs Club, which was sumptuous, but over-vivid like a new Oriental rug. As to other social advancement, his record was an obstacle. Not that it was worse than, nor indeed nearly as bad as, that of many an established member of the inner circle; but the test for an outsider seeking admittance is naturally made more severe. Delavan Eyre, for example, an average sinner for one of his opportunities and standing, had certainly no better a general repute, and latterly a much more dubious one than Marrineal. But Eyre "belonged" of right.

As sufficient indication of Marrineal's status, by the way, it may be pointed out that, while he knew Eyre quite well, it was highly improbable that he would ever know Mrs. Eyre, or, if he did fortuitously come to know her, that he would be able to improve upon the acquaintance. All this Marrineal himself well understood. But it must not be inferred that he resented it. He was far too much of a philosopher for that. It amused him as offering a new game to be played, more difficult certainly and inferentially more interesting than any of those which had hitherto enlisted his somewhat languid efforts. He appreciated also, though with a cynical disbelief in the logic of the situation, that he must polish up his reputation. He was on the new quest at the time when he overheard Banneker and Edmonds discuss the journalistic situation in Katie's restaurant, and had already determined upon his procedure.

Sitting between the two newspaper workers, Marrineal overtopped them both; the supple strength of Banneker as well as the gnarly slenderness of Edmonds. He gave an impression of loose-jointed and rather lazy power; also of quiet self-confidence. He began to talk at once, with the easy, drifting commentary of a man who had seen everything, measured much, and liked the glittering show. Both of the others, one his elder, the other his junior, felt the ready charm of the man. Both were content to listen, waiting for the clue to his intrusion which he had contrived to make not only inoffensive, but seemingly a casual act of good-fellowship. The clue was not afforded, but presently

some shrewd opinion of the newcomer upon the local political situation set them both to discussion. Quite insensibly Marrineal withdrew from the conversation, sipping his coffee and listening with an effect of effortless amenity.

"If we had a newspaper here that wasn't tied hard and fast, politically!" cried Edmonds presently.

Marrineal fingered a specially fragrant cigar. "But a newspaper must be tied to something, mustn't it?" he queried. "Otherwise it drifts."

"Why not to its reading public?" suggested Banneker.

"That's an idea. But can you tie to a public? Isn't the public itself adrift, like seaweed?"

"Blown about by the gales of politics." Edmonds accepted the figure. "Well, the newspaper ought to be the gale."

"I gather that you gentlemen do not think highly of present journalistic conditions."

"You overheard our discussion," said Banneker bluntly.

Marrineal assented. "It did not seem private. Katie's is a sort of free forum. That is why I come. I like to listen. Besides, it touched me pretty closely at one or two points."

The two others turned toward him, waiting. He nodded, and took upon himself an air of well-pondered frankness. "I expect to take a more active part in journalism from now on."

Edmonds followed up the significant phrase. "*More* active? You have newspaper interests?"

"Practically speaking, I own The Patriot. What do you gentlemen think of it?"

"Who reads The Patriot?" inquired Banneker. He was unprepared for the swift and surprised flash from Marrineal's fine eyes, as if some profoundly analytical or revealing suggestion had been made.

"Forty thousand men, women, and children. Not half enough, of course."

"Not a tenth enough, I would say, if I owned the paper. Nor are they the right kind of readers."

"How would you define them, then?" asked Marrineal, still in that smooth voice.

"Small clerks. Race-track followers. People living in that class of tenements which call themselves flats. The more intelligent servants. Totally unimportant people."

"Therefore a totally unimportant paper?"

"A paper can be important only through what it makes people believe and think. What possible difference can it make what The Patriot's readers think?"

"If there were enough of them?" suggested Marrineal.

"No. Besides, you'll never get enough of them, in the way you're running the paper now."

"Don't say 'you,' please," besought Marrineal. "I've been keeping my hands off. Watching."

"And now you're going to take hold?" queried Edmonds. "Personally?"

"As soon as I can find my formula — and the men to help me work it out," he added, after a pause so nicely emphasized that both his hearers had a simultaneous inkling of the reason for his being at their table.

"I've seen newspapers run on formula before," muttered Edmonds.

"Onto the rocks?"

"Invariably."

"That's because the formulas were amateur formulas, isn't it?"

The veteran of a quarter-century turned a mildly quizzical smile upon the adventurer into risky waters. "Well?" he jerked out.

Marrineal's face was quite serious as he took up the obvious implication. "Where is the dividing line between professional and amateur in the newspaper business? You gentlemen will bear with me if I go into personal details a little. I suppose I've always had the newspaper idea. When I was a youngster of twenty, I tried myself out. Got a job as a reporter in St. Louis. It was just a callow escapade. And of course it couldn't last. I was an undisciplined sort of cub. They fired me; quite right, too. But I did learn a little. And at least it educated me in one thing; how to read newspapers." He laughed lightly. "Perhaps that is

as nearly thorough an education as I've ever had in anything."

"It's rather an art, newspaper reading," observed Banneker.

"You've tried it, I gather. So have I, rather exhaustively in the last year. I've been reading every paper in New York every day and all through."

"That's a job for an able-minded man," commented Edmonds, looking at him with a new respect.

"It put eye-glasses on me. But if it dimmed my eyes, it enlightened my mind. The combined newspapers of New York do not cover the available field. They do not begin to cover it. . . . Did you say something, Mr. Banneker?"

"Did I? I didn't mean to," said Banneker hastily. "I'm a good deal interested."

"I'm glad to hear that," returned Marrineal with gravity. "After I'd made my estimate of what the newspapers publish and fail to publish, I canvassed the circulation lists and newsstands and made another discovery. There is a large potential reading public not yet tied up to any newspaper. It's waiting for the right paper."

"The imputation of amateurishness is retracted, with apologies," announced Russell Edmonds.

"Accepted. Though there are amateur areas yet in my mind. I bought The Patriot."

"Does that represent one of the areas?"

"It represents nothing, thus far, except what it has always represented, a hand-to-mouth policy and a financial deficit. But what's wrong with it from your point of view?"

"Cheap and nasty," was the veteran's succinct criticism.

"Any more so than The Sphere? The Sphere's successful."

"Because it plays fair with the main facts. It may gloss 'em up with a touch of sensationalism, like the oil on a barkeep's hair. But it does go after the facts, and pretty generally it presents 'em as found. The Patriot is fakey; clumsy at it, too. Any man arrested with more than five dollars in his pocket is a millionaire clubman. If Bridget O'Flaherty jumps off Brooklyn Bridge, she becomes a prominent society woman with picture (hers or some-

body else's) in The Patriot. And the cheapest little chorus-girl tart, who blackmails a broker's clerk with a breach of promise, gets herself called a 'distinguished actress' and him a 'well-known financier.' Why steal the Police Gazette's rouge and lip-stick?"

"Because it's what the readers want."

"All right. But at least give it to 'em well done. And cut out the printing of wild rumors as news. That doesn't get a paper anything in the long run. None of your readers have any faith in The Patriot."

"Does any paper have the confidence of its public?" returned Marrineal.

Touched upon a sensitive spot, Edmonds cursed briefly. "If it hasn't, it's because the public has a dam'-fool fad for pretending it doesn't believe what it reads. Of course it believes it! Otherwise, how would it know who's president, or that the market sagged yesterday? This 'I-never-believe-what-I-read-in-the-papers' guff makes me sick to the tips of my toes."

"Only the man who knows newspapers from the inside can disbelieve them scientifically," put in Banneker with a smile.

"What would *you* do with The Patriot if you had it?" interrogated the proprietor.

"I? Oh, I'd try to make it interesting," was the prompt and simple reply.

"How, interesting?"

For his own purposes Banneker chose to misinterpret the purport of the question. "So interesting that half a million people would have to read it."

"You think you could do that?"

"I think it could be done."

"Will you come with me and try it?"

"You're offering me a place on The Patriot staff?"

"Precisely. Mr. Edmonds is joining."

That gentleman breathed a small cloud of blue vapor into the air together with the dispassionate query: "Is that so? Hadn't heard of it."

"My principle in business is to determine whether I want

a man or an article, and then bid a price that can't be rejected."

"Sound," admitted the veteran. "Perfectly sound. But I'm not specially in need of money."

"I'm offering you opportunity."

"What kind?"

"Opportunity to handle big stories according to the facts as you see them. Not as you had to handle the Sippiac strike story."

Edmonds set down his pipe. "What did you think of that?"

"A masterpiece of hinting and suggestion and information for those who can read between the lines. Not many have the eye for it. With me you won't have to write between the lines. Not on labor or political questions, anyway. You're a Socialist, aren't you?"

"Yes. You're not going to make The Patriot a Socialist paper, are you?"

"Some people might call it that. I'm going to make it a popular paper. It's going to be for the many against the few. How are you going to bring about Socialism?"

"Education."

"Exactly! What better chance could you ask? A paper devoted to the interests of the masses, and willing to print facts. I want you to do the same sort of thing that you've been doing for The Courier; a job of handling the big, general stories. You'll be responsible to me alone. The salary will be a third higher than you are now getting. Think it over."

"I've thought. I'm bought," said Russell Edmonds. He resumed his pipe.

"And you, Mr. Banneker?"

"I'm not a Socialist, in the party sense. Besides a Socialist paper in New York has no chance of big circulation."

"Oh, The Patriot isn't going to tag itself. Politically it will be independent. Its policy will be socialistic only in that it will be for labor rather than capital and for the under dog as against the upper dog. It certainly won't tie up to the Socialist Party or advocate its principles. It's for fair play and education."

"What's your purpose?" demanded Banneker. "Money?"

"I've a very comfortable income," replied Marrineal modestly.

"Political advancement? Influence? Want to pull the wires?" persisted the other.

"The game. I'm out of employment and tired of it."

"And you think I could be of use in your plan? But you don't know much about me."

Marrineal murmured smilingly something indefinite but complimentary as to Banneker's reputation on Park Row; but this was by no means a fair index to what he knew about Banneker.

Indeed, that prematurely successful reporter would have been surprised at the extent to which Marrineal's private investigations had gone. Not only was the purchaser of The Patriot apprised of Banneker's professional career in detail, but he knew of his former employment, and also of his membership in The Retreat, which he regarded with perplexity and admiration. Marrineal was skilled at ascertainments. He made a specialty of knowing all about people.

"With Mr. Edmonds on roving commission and you to handle the big local stuff," he pursued, "we should have the nucleus of a news organization. Like him, you would be responsible to me alone. And, of course, it would be made worth your while. What do you think? Will you join us?"

"No."

"No?" There was no slightest hint of disappointment, surprise, or resentment in Marrineal's manner. "Do you mind giving me the reason?"

"I don't care to be a reporter on The Patriot."

"Well, this would hardly be reporting. At least, a very specialized and important type."

"For that matter, I don't care to be a reporter on any paper much longer. Besides, you need me — or some one — in another department more than in the news section."

"You don't like the editorials," was the inference which Marrineal drew from this, and correctly.

"I think they're solemn flapdoodle."

"So do I. Occasionally I write them myself and send them in quietly. It isn't known yet that I own the property; so I don't appear at the office. Mine are quite as solemn and flapdoodlish as the others. To which quality do you object the most?"

"Solemnity. It's the blight of editorial expression. All the papers suffer from it."

"Then you wouldn't have the editorial page modeled on that of any of our contemporaries."

"No. I'd try to make it interesting. There isn't a page in town that the average man-in-the-street-car can read without a painful effort at thought."

"Editorials are supposed to be for thinking men," put in Edmonds.

"Make the thinking easy, then. Don't make it hard, with heavy words and a didactic manner. Talk to 'em. You're trying to reach for their brain mechanism. Wrong idea. Reach for their coat-lapels. Hook a finger in the buttonholes and tell 'em something about common things they never stopped to consider. Our editorializers are always tucking their hands into their oratorical bosoms and discoursing in a sonorous voice about freight differentials as an element in stabilizing the market. How does that affect Jim Jones? Why, Jim turns to the sporting page. But if you say to him casually, in print, 'Do you realize that every woman who brings a child into the world shows more heroism than Teddy Roosevelt when he charged up San Juan Hill?'— what'll Jim do about that? Turn to the sporting page just the same, maybe. But after he's absorbed the ball-scores, he'll turn back to the editorial. You see, he never thought about Mrs. Jones just that way before."

"Sentimentalism," observed Marrineal. "Not altogether original, either." But he did not speak as a critic. Rather as one pondering upon new vistas of thought.

"Why shouldn't an editorial be sentimental about something besides the starry flag and the boyhood of its party's candidate? Original? I shouldn't worry overmuch about that. All my time would be occupied in trying to be interesting. After I got 'em interested, I could perhaps be instructive. Very cautiously,

though. But always man to man: that's the editorial trick, as I see it. Not preacher to congregation."

"Where are your editorials, son?" asked the veteran Edmonds abruptly.

"Locked up." Banneker tapped his forehead.

"In the place of their birth?" smiled Marrineal.

"Oh, I don't want too much credit for my idea. A fair share of it belongs to a bald-headed and snarling old nondescript whom I met one day in the Public Library and shall probably never meet again anywhere. Somebody had pointed me out — it was after that shooting mess — and the old fellow came up to me and growled out, 'Employed on a newspaper?' I admitted it. 'What do you know about news?' was his next question. Well, I'm always open to any fresh slants on the business, so I asked him politely what he knew. He put on an expression like a prayerful owl and said, 'Suppose I came into your office with the information that a destructive plague was killing off the earthworms?' Naturally, I thought one of the librarians had put up a joke on me; so I said, 'Refer you to the Anglers' Department of the All-Outdoors Monthly.' 'That is as far as you could see into the information?' he said severely. I had to confess that it was. 'And you are supposed to be a judge of news!' he snarled. Well, he seemed so upset about it that I tried to be soothing by asking him if there was an earthworm pestilence in progress. 'No,' answers he, 'and lucky for you. For if the earthworms all died, so would you and the rest of us, including your accursed brood of newspapers, which would be some compensation. Read Darwin,' croaks the old bird, and calls me a callow fool, and flits."

"Who was he? Did you find out?" asked Edmonds.

"Some scientific grubber from the museum. I looked up the Darwin book and decided that he was right; not Darwin; the old croaker."

"Still, that was not precisely news," pointed out Marrineal.

"Theoretical news. I'm not sure," pursued Banneker, struck with a new idea, "that that isn't the formula for editorial writing; theoretical news. Supplemented by analytical news, of course."

"Philosophizing over Darwin and dead worms would hardly

inspire half a million readers to follow your editorial output, day after day." Marrineal delivered his opinion suavely.

"Not if written in the usual style, suggesting a conscientious rehash of the encyclopædia. But suppose it were done differently, and with a caption like this, 'Why Does an Angle-Worm Wriggle?' Set that in irregular type that weaved and squirmed across the column, and Jones-in-the-street-car would at least look at it."

"Good Heavens! I should think so," assented Marrineal. "And call for the police."

"Or, if that is too sensational," continued Banneker, warming up, "we could head it 'Charles Darwin Would Never Go Fishing, Because' and a heavy dash after 'because.'"

"Fakey," pronounced Edmonds. "Still, I don't know that there's any harm in that kind of faking."

"Merely a trick to catch the eye. I don't know whether Darwin ever went fishing or not. Probably he did if only for his researches. But, in essentials, I'm giving 'em a truth; a big truth."

"What?" inquired Marrineal.

"Solemn sermonizers would call it the inter-relations of life or something to that effect. What I'm after is to coax 'em to think a little."

"About angle-worms?"

"About anything. It's the process I'm after. Only let me start them thinking about evolution and pretty soon I'll have them thinking about the relations of modern society — and thinking my way. Five hundred thousand people, all thinking in the way we told 'em to think —"

"Could elect Willis Enderby mayor of New York," interjected the practical Edmonds.

Marrineal, whose face had become quite expressionless, gave a little start. "Who?" he said.

"Judge Enderby of the Law Enforcement Society."

"Oh! Yes. Of course. Or any one else."

"Or any one else," agreed Banneker, catching a quick, informed glance from Edmonds.

"Frankly, your scheme seems a little fantastic to me," pronounced the owner of The Patriot. "But that may be only because it's new. It might be worth trying out." He reverted again to his expressionless reverie, out of which exhaled the observation: "I wonder what the present editorial staff could do with that."

"Am I to infer that you intend to help yourself to my idea?" inquired Banneker.

Mr. Marrineal aroused himself hastily from his editorial dream. Though by no means a fearful person, he was uncomfortably sensible of a menace, imminent and formidable. It was not in Banneker's placid face, nor in the unaltered tone wherein the pertinent query was couched. Nevertheless, the object of that query became aware that young Banneker was not a person to be trifled with. He now went on, equably to say:

"Because, if you do, it might be as well to give me the chance of developing it."

Possibly the "Of course," with which Marrineal responded to this reasonable suggestion, was just a little bit over-prompt.

"Give me ten days. No: two weeks, and I'll be ready to show my wares. Where can I find you?"

Marrineal gave a telephone address. "It isn't in the book," he said. "It will always get me between 9 A.M. and noon."

They talked of matters journalistic, Marrineal lapsing tactfully into the rôle of attentive listener again, until there appeared in the lower room a dark-faced man of thirty-odd, spruce and alert, who, upon sighting them, came confidently forward. Marrineal ordered him a drink and presented him to the two journalists as Mr. Ely Ives. As Mr. Ives, it appeared, was in the secret of Marrineal's journalistic connection, the talk was resumed, becoming more general. Presently Marrineal consulted his watch.

"You're not going up to the After-Theater Club to-night?" he asked Banneker, and, on receiving a negative reply, made his adieus and went out with Ives to his waiting car.

Banneker and Edmonds looked at each other. "Don't both speak at once," chuckled Banneker. "What do *you?*"

"Think of him? He's a smooth article. Very smooth. But I've seen 'em before that were straight as well as smooth."

"Bland," said Banneker. "Bland with a surpassing blandness. A blandness amounting to blandeur, as grandness in the highest degree becomes grandeur. I like that word," Banneker chucklingly approved himself. "But I wouldn't use it in an editorial, one of those editorials that our genial friend was going to appropriate so coolly. A touch of the pirate in him, I think. I like him."

"Yes; you have to. He makes himself likable. What do you figure Mr. Ely Ives to be?"

"Henchman."

"Do you know him?"

"I've seen him uptown, once or twice. He has some reputation as an amateur juggler."

"I know him, too. But he doesn't remember me or he wouldn't have been so pleasant," said the veteran, committing two errors in one sentence, for Ely Ives had remembered him perfectly, and in any case would never have exhibited any unnecessary rancor in his carefully trained manner. "Wrote a story about him once. He's quite a betting man; some say a sure-thing bettor. Several years ago Bob Wessington was giving one of his famous booze parties on board his yacht 'The Water-Wain,' and this chap was in on it somehow. When everybody was tanked up, they got to doing stunts and he bet a thousand with Wessington he could swarm up the backstay to the masthead. Two others wished in for a thousand apiece, and he cleaned up the lot. It cut his hands up pretty bad, but that was cheap at three thousand. Afterwards it turned out that he'd been practicing that very climb in heavy gloves, down in South Brooklyn. So I wrote the story. He came back with a threat of a libel suit. Fool bluff, for it wasn't libelous. But I looked up his record a little and found he was an ex-medical student, from Chicago, where he'd been on The Chronicle for a while. He quit that to become a press-agent for a group of oil-gamblers, and must have done some good selling himself, for he had money when he landed here. To the best of my knowledge he is now a sort of lookout for the Combination

Traction people, with some connection with the City Illuminating Company on the side. It's a secret sort of connection."

Banneker made the world-wide symbolistic finger-shuffle of money-handling. "Legislative?" he inquired.

"Possibly. But it's more keeping a watch on publicity and politics. He gives himself out as a man-about-town, and is supposed to make a good thing out of the market. Maybe he does, though I notice that generally the market makes a good thing out of the smart guy who tries to beat it."

"Not a particularly desirable person for a colleague."

"I doubt if he'd be Marrineal's colleague exactly. The inside of the newspaper isn't his game. More likely he's making himself attractive and useful to Marrineal just to find out what he's up to with his paper."

"I'll show him something interesting if I get hold of that editorial page."

"Son, are you up to it, d'you think?" asked Edmonds with affectionate solicitude. "It takes a lot of experience to handle policies."

"I'll have you with me, won't I, Pop? Besides, if my little scheme works, I'm going out to gather experience like a bee after honey."

"We'll make a queer team, we three," mused the veteran, shaking his bony head, as he leaned forward over his tiny pipe. His protuberant forehead seemed to overhang the idea protectively. Or perhaps threateningly. "None of us looks at a newspaper from the same angle or as the same kind of a machine as the others view it."

"Never mind our views. They'll assimilate. What about his?"

"Ah! I wish I knew. But he wants something. Like all of us." A shade passed across the clearly modeled severity of the face. Edmonds sighed. "I don't know but that I'm too old for this kind of experiment. Yet I've fallen for the temptation."

"Pop," said Banneker with abrupt irrelevance, "there's a line from Emerson that you make me think of when you look like that. 'His sad lucidity of soul.'"

"Do I? But it isn't Emerson. It's Matthew Arnold."

"Where do you find time for poetry, you old wheelhorse! Never mind; you ought to be painted as the living embodiment of that line."

"Or as a wooden automaton, jumping at the end of a special wire from 'our correspondent.' Ban, can you see Marrineal's hand on a wire?"

"If it's plain enough to be visible, I'm underestimating his tact. I'd like to have a lock of his hair to dream on to-night. I'm off to think things over, Pop. Good-night."

Banneker walked uptown, through dimmed streets humming with the harmonic echoes of the city's never-ending life, faint and delicate. He stopped at Sherry's, and at a small table in the side room sat down with a bottle of ale, a cigarette, and some stationery. When he rose, it was to mail a letter. That done, he went back to his costly little apartment upon which the rent would be due in a few days. He had the cash in hand: that was all right. As for the next month, he wondered humorously whether he would have the wherewithal to meet the recurring bill, not to mention others. However, the consideration was not weighty enough to keep him sleepless....

Custom kindly provides its own patent shock-absorbers to all the various organisms of nature; otherwise the whole régime would perish. Necessarily a newspaper is among the best protected of organisms against shock: it deals, as one might say, largely in shocks, and its hand is subdued to what it works in. Nevertheless, on the following noon The Ledger office was agitated as it hardly would have been had Brooklyn Bridge fallen into the East River, or the stalest mummy in the Natural History Museum shown stirrings of life. A word was passing from eager mouth to incredulous ear.

Banneker had resigned.

## Chapter XV

Looking out of the front window, into the decorum of Grove Street, Mrs. Brashear could hardly credit the testimony of her glorified eyes. Could the occupant of the taxi indeed be Mr. Banneker whom, a few months before and most sorrowfully, she had sacrificed to the stern respectability of the house? And was it possible, as the very elegant trunk inscribed "E. B. — New York City" indicated, that he was coming back as a lodger? For the first time in her long and correct professional career, the landlady felt an unqualified bitterness in the fact that all her rooms were occupied.

The occupant of the taxi jumped out and ran lightly up the steps.

"How d'you do, Mrs. Brashear. Am I still excommunicated?"

"Oh, Mr. Banneker! I'm *so* glad to see you. If I could tell you how often I've blamed myself —"

"Let's forget all that. The point is I've come back."

"Oh, dear! I do hate not to take you in. But there isn't a spot."

"Who's got my old room?"

"Mr. Hainer."

"Hainer? Let's turn him out."

"I would in a minute," declared the ungrateful landlady to whom Mr. Hainer had always been a model lodger. "But the law —"

"Oh, I'll fix Hainer if you'll fix the room."

"How?" asked the bewildered Mrs. Brashear.

"The room? Just as it used to be. Bed, table, couple of chairs, bookshelf."

"But Mr. Hainer's things?"

"Store 'em. It'll be for only a month."

Leaving his trunk, Banneker sallied forth in smiling confidence to accost and transfer the unsuspecting occupant of his room. To achieve this, it was necessary only to convince the

object of the scheme that the incredible offer was made in good faith; an apartment in the "swell" Regalton, luxuriously furnished, service and breakfast included, rent free for a whole month. A fairy-tale for the prosaic Hainer to be gloated over for the rest of his life! Very quietly, for this was part of the bargain, the middle-aged accountant moved to his new glories and Banneker took his old quarters. It was all accomplished that evening. The refurnishing was finished on the following day.

"But what are you doing it for, if I may be so bold, Mr. Banneker?" asked the landlady.

"Peace, quiet, and work," he answered gayly. "Just to be where nobody can find me, while I do a job."

Here, as in the old, jobless days, Banneker settled down to concentrated and happy toil. Always a creature of Spartan self-discipline in the matter of work, he took on, in this quiet and remote environment, new energies. Miss Westlake, recipient of the output as it came from the hard-driven pen, was secretly disquieted. Could any human being maintain such a pace without collapse? Day after day, the devotee of the third-floor-front rose at seven, breakfasted from a thermos bottle and a tin box, and set upon his writing; lunched hastily around the corner, returned with armfuls of newspapers which he skimmed as a preliminary to a second long bout with his pen; allowed himself an hour for dinner, and came back to resume the never-ending task. As in the days of the "Eban" sketches, now on the press for book publication, it was write, rewrite, and re-rewrite, the typed sheets coming back to Miss Westlake amended, interlined, corrected, but always successively shortened and simplified. Profitable, indeed, for the solicitous little typist; but she ventured, after a fortnight of it, to remonstrate on the score of ordinary prudence. Banneker laughed, though he was touched, too, by her interest.

"I'm indestructible," he assured her. "But next week I shall run around outside a little."

"You must," she insisted.

"Field-work, I believe they call it. The Elysian Fields of

Manhattan Island. Perhaps you'll come with me sometimes and see that I attend properly to my recreation."

Curiosity as well as a mere personal interest prompted her to accept. She did not understand the purpose of these strange and vivid writings committed to her hands, so different from any of the earlier of Mr. Banneker's productions; so different, indeed, from anything that she had hitherto seen in any print. Nor did she derive full enlightenment from her Elysian journeys with the writer. They seemed to be casual if not aimless. The pair traveled about on street-cars, L trains, Fifth Avenue buses, dined in queer, crowded restaurants, drank in foreign-appearing beer-halls, went to meetings, to Cooper Union forums, to the Art Gallery, the Aquarium, the Museum of Natural History, to dances in East-Side halls: and everywhere, by virtue of his easy and graceful good-fellowship, Banneker picked up acquaintances, entered into their discussions, listened to their opinions and solemn dicta, agreeing or controverting with equal good-humor, and all, one might have carelessly supposed, in the idlest spirit of a light-minded Haroun al Raschid.

"What is it all about, if you don't mind telling?" asked his companion as he bade her good-night early one morning.

"To find what people naturally talk about," was the ready answer.

"And then?"

"To talk with them about what interests them. In print."

"Then it isn't Elysian-fielding at all."

"No. It's work. Hard work."

"And what do you do after it?"

"Oh, sit up and write for a while."

"You'll break down."

"Oh, no! It's good for me."

And, indeed, it was better for him than the alternative of trying to sleep without the anodyne of complete exhaustion. For again, his hours were haunted by the not-to-be-laid spirit of Io Welland. As in those earlier days when, with hot eyes and set teeth, he had sent up his nightly prayer for deliverance from the powers of the past —

"Heaven shield and keep us free
From the wizard, Memory
And his cruel necromancies!"—

she came back to her old sway over his soul, and would not be exorcised. — So he drugged his brain against her with the opiate of weariness.

Three of his four weeks had passed when Banneker began to whistle at his daily stent. Thereafter small boys, grimy with printer's ink, called occasionally, received instructions and departed, and there emanated from his room the clean and bitter smell of paste, and the clip of shears. Despite all these new activities, the supply of manuscript for Miss Westlake's typewriter never failed. One afternoon Banneker knocked at the door, asked her if she thought she could take dictation direct, and on her replying doubtfully that she could try, transferred her and her machine to his den, which was littered with newspapers, proof-sheets, and foolscap. Walking to and fro with a sheet of the latter inscribed with a few notes in his hand, the hermit proceeded to deliver himself to the briskly clicking writing machine.

"Three-em dash," said he at the close. "That seemed to go fairly well."

"Are you training me?" asked Miss Westlake.

"No. I'm training myself. It's easier to write, but it's quicker to talk. Some day I'm going to be really busy" — Miss Westlake gasped — "and time-saving will be important. Shall we try it again to-morrow?"

She nodded. "I could brush up my shorthand and take it quicker."

"Do you know shorthand?" He looked at her contemplatively. "Would you care to take a regular position, paying rather better than this casual work?"

"With you?" asked Miss Westlake in a tone which constituted a sufficient acceptance.

"Yes. Always supposing that I land one myself. I'm in a big gamble, and these," he swept a hand over the littered accumulations, "are my cards. If they're good enough, I'll win."

"They are good enough," said Miss Westlake with simple faith.

"I'll know to-morrow," replied Banneker.

For a young man, jobless, highly unsettled of prospects, the ratio of whose debts to his assets was inversely to what it should have been, Banneker presented a singularly care-free aspect when, at 11 A.M. of a rainy morning, he called at Mr. Tertius Marrineal's Fifth Avenue house, bringing with him a suitcase heavily packed. Mr. Marrineal's personal Jap took over the burden and conducted it and its owner to a small rear room at the top of the house. Banneker apprehended at the first glance that this was a room for work. Mr. Marrineal, rising from behind a broad, glass-topped table with his accustomed amiable smile, also looked workmanlike.

"You have decided to come with us, I hope," said he pleasantly enough, yet with a casual politeness which might have been meant to suggest a measure of indifference. Banneker at once caught the note of bargaining.

"If you think my ideas are worth my price," he replied.

"Let's have the ideas."

"No trouble to show goods," Banneker said, unclasping the suitcase. He preferred to keep the talk in light tone until his time came. From the case he extracted two close-packed piles of news-print, folded in half.

"Coals to Newcastle," smiled Marrineal. "These seem to be copies of The Patriot."

"Not exact copies. Try this one." Selecting an issue at random he passed it to the other.

Marrineal went into it carefully, turning from the front page to the inside, and again farther in the interior, without comment. Nor did he speak at once when he came to the editorial page. But he glanced up at Banneker before settling down to read.

"Very interesting," he said presently, in a non-committal manner. "Have you more?"

Silently Banneker transferred to the table-top the remainder of the suitcase's contents. Choosing half a dozen at random, Marrineal turned each inside out and studied the editorial columns. His expression did not in any degree alter.

"You have had these editorials set up in type to suit yourself, I take it," he observed after twenty minutes of perusal; "and have pasted them into the paper."

"Exactly."

"Why the double-column measure?"

"More attractive to the eye. It stands out."

"And the heavy type for the same reason?"

"Yes. I want to make 'em just as easy to read as possible."

"They're easy to read," admitted the other. "Are they all yours?"

"Mine — and others'."

Marrineal looked a bland question. Banneker answered it.

"I've been up and down in the highways and the low-ways, Mr. Marrineal, taking those editorials from the speech of the ordinary folk who talk about their troubles and their pleasures."

"I see. Straight from the throbbing heart of the people. Jones-in-the-street-car."

"And Mrs. Jones. Don't forget her. She'll read 'em."

"If she doesn't, it won't be because they don't bid for her interest. Here's this one, 'Better Cooking Means Better Husbands: Try It.' That's the *argumentum ad feminam* with a vengeance."

"Yes. I picked that up from a fat old party who was advising a thin young wife at a fish-stall. 'Give'm his food *right* an' he'll come home to it, 'stid o' workin' the free lunch.'"

"Here are two on the drink question. 'Next Time Ask the Barkeep Why *He* Doesn't Drink,' and, 'Mighty Elephants Like Rum — and Are Chained Slaves.'"

"You'll find more moralizing on booze if you look farther. It's one of the subjects they talk most about."

"'The Sardine is Dead: Therefore More Comfortable Than You, Mr. Straphanger,'" read Marrineal.

"Go up in the rush-hour L any day and you'll hear that editorial with trimmings."

"And 'Mr. Flynn Owes You a Yacht Ride' is of the same order, I suppose."

"Yes. If it had been practicable, I'd have had some insets

with that: a picture of Flynn, a cut of his new million-dollar yacht, and a table showing the twenty per cent dividends that the City Illuminating Company pays by over-taxing Jones on his lighting and heating. That would almost tell the story without comment."

"I see. Still making it easy for them to read."

Marrineal ran over a number of other captions, sensational, personal, invocative, and always provocative: "Man, Why Hasn't Your Wife Divorced You?" "John L. Sullivan, the Great Unknown." "Why Has the Ornithorhyncus Got a Beak?" "If You Must Sell Your Vote, Ask a Fair Price For It." "Mustn't Play, You Kiddies: It's a Crime: Ask Judge Croban." "Socrates, Confucius, Buddha, Christ; All Dead, But—!!!" "The Inventor of Goose-Plucking Was the First Politician. They're At It Yet." "How Much Would You Pay a Man to Think For You?" "Air Doesn't Cost Much: Have You Got Enough to Breathe?"

"All this," said the owner of The Patriot, "is taken from what people talk and think about?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't some of it reach out into the realm of what Mr. Banneker thinks they *ought* to talk and think about?"

Banneker laughed. "Discovered! Oh, I won't pretend but what I propose to teach 'em thinking."

"If you can do that and make them think our way —"

"'Give me place for my fulcrum,' said Archimedes."

"But that's an editorial you won't write very soon. One more detail. You've thrown up words and phrases into capital letters all through for emphasis. I doubt whether that will do."

"Why not?"

"Haven't you shattered enough traditions without that? The public doesn't want to be taught with a pointer. I'm afraid that's rather too much of an innovation."

"No innovation at all. In fact, it's adapted plagiarism."

"From what?"

"Harper's Monthly of the seventy's. I used to have some odd volumes in my little library. There was a department

of funny anecdote; and the point of every joke, lest some obtuse reader should overlook it, was printed in italics. That," chuckled Banneker, "was in the days when we used to twit the English with lacking a sense of humor. However, the method has its advantages. It's fool-proof. Therefore I helped myself to it."

"Then you're aiming at the weak-minded?"

"At anybody who can assimilate simple ideas plainly expressed," declared the other positively. "There ought to be four million of 'em within reaching distance of The Patriot's presses."

"Your proposition — though you haven't made any as yet — is that we lead our editorial page daily with matter such as this. Am I correct?"

"No. Make a clean sweep of the present editorials. Substitute mine. One a day will be quite enough for their minds to work on."

"But that won't fill the page," objected the proprietor.

"Cartoon. Column of light comment. Letters from readers. That will," returned Banneker with severe brevity.

"It might be worth trying," mused Marrineal.

"It might be worth, to a moribund paper, almost anything." The tone was significant.

"Then you are prepared to join our staff?"

"On suitable terms."

"I had thought of offering you," Marrineal paused for better effect, "one hundred and fifty dollars a week."

Banneker was annoyed. That was no more than he could earn, with a little outside work, on The Ledger. He had thought of asking two hundred and fifty. Now he said promptly:

"Those editorials are worth three hundred a week to any paper. As a starter," he added.

A pained and patient smile overspread Marrineal's regular features. "The Patriot's leader-writer draws a hundred at present."

"I dare say."

"The whole page costs barely three hundred."

"It is overpaid."

"For a comparative novice," observed Marrineal without rancor, "you do not lack self-confidence."

"There are the goods," said Banneker evenly. "It is for you to decide whether they are worth the price asked."

"And there's where the trouble is," confessed Marrineal. "I don't know. They might be."

Banneker made his proposition. "You spoke of my being a novice. I admit the weak spot. I want more experience. You can afford to try this out for six months. In fact, you can't afford not to. Something has got to be done with The Patriot, and soon. It's losing ground daily."

"You are mistaken," returned Marrineal.

"Then the news-stands and circulation lists are mistaken, too," retorted the other. "Would you care to see my figures?"

Marrineal waved away the suggestion with an easy gesture which surrendered the point.

"Very well. I'm backing the new editorial idea to get circulation."

"With my money," pointed out Marrineal.

"I can't save you the money. But I can spread it for you, that three hundred dollars."

"How, spread it?"

"Charge half to editorial page: half to the news department."

"On account of what services to the news department?"

"General. That is where I expect to get my finishing experience. I've had enough reporting. Now I'm after the special work; a little politics, a little dramatic criticism; a touch of sports; perhaps some book-reviewing and financial writing. And, of course, an apprenticeship in the Washington office."

"Haven't you forgotten the London correspondence?"

Whether or not this was sardonic, Banneker did not trouble to determine. "Too far away, and not time enough," he answered. "Later, perhaps, I can try that."

"And while you are doing all these things who is to carry out the editorial idea?"

"I am."

Marrineal stared. "Both? At the same time?"

"Yes."

"No living man could do it."

"I can do it. I've proved it to myself."

"How and where?"

"Since I last saw you. Now that I've got the hang of it, I can do an editorial in the morning, another in the afternoon, a third in the evening. Two and a half days a week will turn the trick. That leaves the rest of the time for the other special jobs."

"You won't live out the six months."

"Insure my life if you like," laughed Banneker. "Work will never kill me."

Marrineal, sitting with inscrutable face turned half away from his visitor, was beginning, "If I meet you on the salary," when Banneker broke in:

"Wait until you hear the rest. I'm asking that for six months only. Thereafter I propose to drop the non-editorial work and with it the salary."

"With what substitute?"

"A salary based upon one cent a week for every unit of circulation put on from the time the editorials begin publication."

"It sounds innocent," remarked Marrineal. "It isn't as innocent as it sounds," he added after a penciled reckoning on the back of an envelope. "In case we increase fifty thousand, you will be drawing twenty-five thousand a year."

"Well? Won't it be worth the money?"

"I suppose it would," admitted Marrineal dubiously. "Of course fifty thousand in six months is an extreme assumption. Suppose the circulation stands still?"

"Then I starve. It's a gamble. But it strikes me that I'm giving the odds."

"Can you amuse yourself for an hour?" asked Marrineal abruptly.

"Why, yes," answered Banneker hesitantly. "Perhaps you'd turn me loose in your library. I'd find something to put in the time on there."

"Not very much, I'm afraid," replied his host apologetically.

"I'm of the low-brow species in my reading tastes, or else rather severely practical. You'll find some advertising data that may interest you, however."

From the hour — which grew to an hour and a half — spent in the library, Banneker sought to improve his uncertain conception of his prospective employer's habit and trend of mind. The hope of revelation was not borne out by the reading matter at hand. Most of it proved to be technical.

When he returned to Marrineal's den, he found Russell Edmonds with the host.

"Well, son, you've turned the trick," was the veteran's greeting.

"You've read 'em?" asked Banneker, and Marrineal was shrewd enough to note the instinctive shading of manner when expert spoke to expert. He was an outsider, being merely the owner. It amused him.

"Yes. They're dam' good."

"Aren't they dam' good?" returned Banneker eagerly.

"They'll save the day if anything can."

"Precisely my own humble opinion if a layman may speak," put in Marrineal. "Mr. Banneker, shall I have the contract drawn up?"

"Not on my account. I don't need any. If I haven't made myself so essential after the six months that you *have* to keep me on, I'll want to quit."

"Still in the gambling mood," smiled Marrineal.

The two practical journalists left, making an appointment to spend the following morning with Marrineal in planning policy and methods. Banneker went back to his apartment and wrote Miss Camilla Van Arsdale all about it, in exultant mood.

Brains to let! But I've got my price. And I'll get a higher one: the highest, if I can hold out. It's all due to you. If you hadn't kept my mind turned to things worth while in the early days at Manzanita, with your music and books and your taste for all that is fine, I'd have fallen into a rut. It's success, the first real taste. I like it. I love it. And I owe it all to you.

Camilla Van Arsdale, yearning over the boyish outburst, smiled and sighed and mused and was vaguely afraid, with quasi-maternal fears. She, too, had had her taste of success; a marvelous stimulant, bubbling with inspiration and incitement. But for all except the few who are strong and steadfast, there lurks beneath the effervescence a subtle poison.

## Chapter XVI

Not being specially gifted with originality of either thought or expression, Mr. Herbert Cressey stopped Banneker outside of his apartment with the remark made and provided for the delayed reunion of frequent companions: "Well I thought you were dead!"

By way of keeping to the same level Banneker replied cheerfully: "I'm not."

"Where've you been all this while?"

"Working."

"Where were you Monday last? Didn't see you at Sherry's."

"Working."

"And the week before? You weren't at The Retreat."

"Working, also."

"And the week before that? Nobody's seen so much —"

"Working. Working. Working."

"I stopped in at your roost and your new man told me you were away and might be gone indefinitely. Funny chap, your new man. Mysterious sort of manner. Where'd you pick him up?"

"Oh, Lord! Hainer!" exclaimed Banneker appreciatively. "Well, he told the truth."

"You look pulled down, too, by Jove!" commented Cressey, concern on his sightly face. "Ridin' for a fall, aren't you?"

"Only for a test. I'm going to let up next week."

"Tell you what," proffered Cressey. "Let's do a day together. Say Wednesday, eh? I'm giving a little dinner that night. And, oh, I say! By the way — no: never mind that. You'll come, won't you? It'll be at The Retreat."

"Yes: I'll come. I'll be playing polo that afternoon."

"Not if Jim Maitland sees you first. He's awfully sore on you for not turning up to practice. Had a place for you on the second team."

"Don't want it. I'm through with polo."

"Ban! What the devil —"

"Work, I tell you. Next season I may be able to play. For the present I'm off everything."

"Have they made you *all* the editors of The Ledger in one?"

"I'm off The Ledger, too. Give you all the painful details Wednesday. Fare-you-well."

General disgust and wrath pervaded the atmosphere of the polo field when Banneker, making his final appearance on Wednesday, broke the news to Maitland, Densmore, and the others.

"Just as you were beginning to know one end of your stick from the other," growled the irate team captain.

Banneker played well that afternoon because he played recklessly. Lack of practice sometimes works out that way; as if luck took charge of a man's play and carried him through. Three of the five goals made by the second team fell to his mallet, and he left the field heartily cursed on all sides for his recalcitrancy in throwing himself away on work when the sport of sports called him. Regretful, yet well pleased with himself, he had his bath, his one, lone drink, and leisurely got into his evening clothes. Cressey met him at the entry to the guest's lounge giving on the general dining-room.

"Damned if you're not a good-lookin' chap, Ban!" he declared with something like envy in his voice. "Thinning down a bit gives you a kind of look. No wonder Mertoun puts in his best licks on your clothes."

"Which reminds me that I've neglected even Mertoun," smiled Banneker.

"Go ahead in, will you? I've got to bone some feller for a fresh collar. My cousin's in there somewhere. Mrs. Rogerson Lyle from Philadelphia. She's a pippin in pink. Go in and tell on yourself, and order her a cocktail."

Seeking to follow the vague direction, Banneker turned to the left and entered a dim side room. No pippin in pink disclosed herself. But a gracious young figure in black was bending over a table looking at a magazine, the long, free curve of her back turned toward him. He advanced. The woman said in a soft voice that shook him to the depths of his soul:

"Back so soon, Archie? Want Sis to fix your tie?"

She turned then and said easily: "Oh, I thought you were my brother. . . . How do you do, Ban?"

Io held out her hand to him. He hardly knew whether or not he took it until he felt the close, warm pressure of her fingers. Never before had he so poignantly realized that innate splendor of femininity that was uniquely hers, a quality more potent than any mere beauty. Her look met his straight and frankly, but he heard the breath flutter at her lips, and he thought to read in her eyes a question, a hunger, and a delight. His voice was under rigid control as he said:

"I didn't know you were to be here, Mrs. Eyre."

"I knew that you were," she retorted. "And I'm not Mrs. Eyre, please. I'm Io."

He shook his head. "That was in another world."

"Oh, Ban, Ban!" she said. Her lips seemed to cherish the name that they gave forth so softly. "Don't be a silly Ban. It's the same world, only older; a million years older, I think. . . . I came here only because you were coming. Are you a million years older, Ban?"

"Unfair," he said hoarsely.

"I'm never unfair. I play the game." Her little, firm chin went up defiantly. Yes: she was more lovely and vivid and desirable than in the other days. Or was it only the unstifled yearning in his heart that made her seem so? "Have you missed me?" she asked simply.

He made no answer.

"I've missed you." She walked over to the window and stood looking out into the soft and breathing murk of the night. When she came back to him, her manner had changed. "Fancy finding you here of all places!" she said gayly.

"It isn't such a bad place to be," he said, relieved to meet her on the new ground.

"It's a goal," she declared. "Half of the aspiring gilded youth of the city would give their eye-teeth to make it. How did you manage?"

"I didn't manage. It was managed for me. Old Poultney Masters put me in."

"Well, don't scowl at me! For a reporter, you know, it's rather an achievement to get into The Retreat."

"I suppose so. Though I'm not a reporter now."

"Well, for any newspaper man. What are you, by the way?"

"A sort of all-round experimental editor."

"I hadn't heard of that," said Io, with a quickness which apprised him that she had been seeking information about him.

"Nobody has. It's only just happened."

"And I'm the first to know of it? That's as it should be," she asserted calmly. "You shall tell me all about it at dinner."

"Am I taking you in?"

"No: you're taking in my cousin, Esther Forbes. But I'm on your left. Be nice to me."

Others came in and joined them. Banneker, his inner brain a fiery whorl, though the outer convolutions which he used for social purposes remained quite under control, drifted about making himself agreeable and approving himself to his host as an asset of the highest value. At dinner, sprightly and mischievous Miss Forbes, who recalled their former meeting at Sherry's, found him wholly delightful and frankly told him so. He talked little with Io; but he was conscious to his nerve-ends of the sweet warmth of her so near him. To her questions about his developing career he returned vague replies or generalizations.

"You're not drinking anything," she said, as the third course came on. "Have you renounced the devil and all his works?" There was an impalpable stress upon the "all."

His answer, composed though it was in tone, quite satisfied her. "I wouldn't dare touch drink to-night."

After dinner there was faro bank. Banneker did not play. Io, after a run of indifferent luck, declared herself tired of the game and turned to him.

"Take me out somewhere where there is air to breathe."

They stood together on the stone terrace, blown lightly upon by a mist-ladden breeze.

"It ought to be a great drive of rain, filling the world," said Io in her voice of dreams. "The roar of waters above us and below, and the glorious sense of being in the grip of a resistless cur-

rent.... We're all in the grip of resistless currents. D'you believe that yet, Ban?"

"No."

"Skeptic! You want to work out your own fate. You 'strive to see, to choose your path.' Well, you've climbed. Is it success, Ban?"

"It will be."

"And have you reached the Mountains of Fulfillment?"

He shook his head. "One never does, climbing alone."

"Has it been alone, Ban?"

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Always."

"So it has been for me — really. No," she added swiftly; "don't ask me questions. Not now. I want to hear more of your new venture."

He outlined his plan and hopes for The Patriot.

"It's good," she said gravely. "It's power, and so it's danger. But it's good.... Are we friends, Ban?"

"How can we be!"

"How can we not be! You've tried to drop me out of your life. Oh, I know, because I know you — better than you think. You'll never drop me out of your life again," she murmured with confident wistfulness. "Never, Ban.... Let's go in."

Not until she came to bid him good-night, with a lingering handclasp, her palm cleaving to his like the reluctant severance of lips, did she tell him that she was going away almost immediately. "But I had to make sure first that you were really alive, and still Ban," she said.

It was many months before he saw her again.

END OF PART II

# PART III

## FULFILLMENT

# PART III

## FULFILLMENT

### CHAPTER I

THE House With Three Eyes sent forth into the darkness a triple glow of hospitality. Through the aloof Chelsea district street, beyond the westernmost L structure, came taxicabs, hansoms, private autos, to discharge at the central door men who were presently revealed, under the lucent globe above the lintel, to be for the most part silhouette studies in the black of festal tailoring and silk hat against the white of expansive shirt-front. Occasionally, though less often, one of the doors at either flank of the house, also overwatched by shining orbs, opened to discharge an early departure. A midnight wayfarer, pausing opposite to contemplate this inexplicable grandeur in a dingy neighborhood, sought enlightenment from the passing patrolman:

"Wot's doin'? Swell gamblin' joint? Huh?" As he spoke a huge, silent car crept swiftly to the entry, which opened to swallow up two bareheaded, luxuriously befurred women, with their escorts. The curious wayfarer promptly amended his query, though not for the better.

"Naw!" replied the policeman with scorn. "That's Mr. Banneker's house."

"Banneker? Who's Banneker?"

With augmented contempt the officer requested the latest quotations on clover seed. "He's the editor of The Patriot," he vouchsafed. "A millionaire, too, they say. And a good sport."

"Givin' a party, huh?"

"Every Saturday night," answered one of the uniform and night-stick, who, having participated below-stairs in the refections of the entertainment, was condescending enough to be informative. "Say, the swellest folks in New York fall over themselves to get invited here."

"Why ain't he on Fi'th Avenyah, then?" demanded the other.

"He makes the Fi'th Avenyah bunch come to him," explained the policeman, with obvious pride. "Took a couple of these old houses on long lease, knocked out the walls, built 'em into one, on his own plan, and, say! It's a pallus! I been all through it."

A lithely powerful figure took the tall steps of the house three at a time, and turned, under the light, to toss away a cigar.

"Cheest!" exclaimed the wayfarer in tones of awe: "that's K. O. Doyle, the middleweight, ain't it?"

"Sure! That's nothin'. If you was to get inside there you'd bump into some of the biggest guys in town; a lot of high-ups from Wall Street, and maybe a couple of these professors from Columbyah College, and some swell actresses, and a bunch of high-brow writers and painters, and a dozen dames right off the head of the Four Hundred list. He takes 'em, all kinds, Mr. Banneker does, just so they're *somethin'*. He's a wonder."

The wayfarer passed on to his oniony boarding-house, a few steps along, deeply marveling at the irruption of magnificence into the neighborhood in the brief year since he had been away.

Equipages continued to draw up, unload, and withdraw, until twelve thirty, when, without so much as a preliminary wink, the House shut its Three Eyes. A scant five minutes earlier, an alert but tired-looking man, wearing the slouch hat of the West above his dinner coat, had briskly mounted the steps and, after colloquy with the cautious, black guardian of the door, had been admitted to a side room, where he was presently accosted by a graying, spare-set guest with ruminative eyes.

"I heard about this show by accident, and wanted in," explained the newcomer in response to the other's look of inquiry. "If I could see Banneker —"

"It will be some little time before you can see him. He's at work."

"But this is his party, isn't it?"

"Yes. The party takes care of itself until he comes down."

"Oh; does it? Well, will it take care of me?"

"Are you a friend of Mr. Banneker's?"

"In a way. In fact, I might claim to have started him on his

career of newspaper crime. I'm Gardner of the Angelica City Herald."

"Ban will be glad to see you. Take off your things. I am Russell Edmonds."

He led the way into a spacious and beautiful room, filled with the composite hum of voices and the scent of half-hidden flowers. The Westerner glanced avidly about him, noting here a spoken name familiar in print, there a face recognized from far-spread photographic reproduction.

"Some different from Ban's shack on the desert," he muttered. "Hello! Mr. Edmonds, who's the splendid-looking woman in brown with the yellow orchids, over there in the seat back of the palms?"

Edmonds leaned forward to look. "Royce Melvin, the composer, I believe. I haven't met her."

"I have, then," returned the other, as the guest changed her position, fully revealing her face. "Tried to dig some information out of her once. Like picking prickly pears blindfold. That's Camilla Van Arsdale. What a coincidence to find her here!"

"No! Camilla Van Arsdale? You'll excuse me, won't you? I want to speak to her. Make yourself known to any one you like the looks of. That's the rule of the house; no introductions."

He walked across the room, made his way through the crescent curving about Miss Van Arsdale, and, presenting himself, was warmly greeted.

"Let me take you to Ban," he said. "He'll want to see you at once."

"But won't it disturb his work?"

"Nothing does. He writes with an open door and a shut brain."

He led her up the east flight of stairs and down a long hallway to an end room with door ajar, notwithstanding that even at that distance the hum of voices and the muffled throbbing of the concert grand piano from below were plainly audible. Banneker's voice, regular, mechanical, desensitized as the voices of those who dictate habitually are prone to become, floated out:

"Quote where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise end quote comma said a poet who was also a cynic period. Many poets are comma but not the greatest period. Because of their — turn back to the beginning of the paragraph, please, Miss Westlake."

"I've brought up an old friend, Ban," announced Edmonds, pushing wide the door.

Vaguely smiling, for he had trained himself to be impervious to interruptions, the editorializer turned in his chair. Instantly he sprang to his feet, and caught Miss Van Arsdale by both hands.

"Miss Camilla!" he cried. "I thought you said you couldn't come."

"I'm defying the doctors," she replied. "They've given me so good a report of myself that I can afford to. I'll go down now and wait for you."

"No; don't. Sit up here with me till I finish. I don't want to lose any of you," said he affectionately.

But she laughingly refused, declaring that he would be through all the sooner for his other guests, if she left him.

"See that she meets some people, Bop," Banneker directed. "Gaines of The New Era, if he's here, and Betty Raleigh, and that new composer, and the Junior Masters."

Edmonds nodded, and escorted her downstairs. Nicely judging the time when Banneker would have finished, he was back in quarter of an hour. The stenographer had just left.

"What a superb woman, Ban!" he said. "It's small wonder that Enderby lost himself."

Banneker nodded. "What would she have said if she could know that you, an absolute stranger, had been the means of saving her from a terrific scandal? Gives one a rather shivery feeling about the power and responsibility of the press, doesn't it?"

"It would have been worse than murder," declared the veteran, with so much feeling that his friend gave him a grateful look. "What's she doing in New York? Is it safe?"

"Came on to see a specialist. Yes; it's all right. The Enderbys are abroad."

"I see. How long since you'd seen her?"

"Before this trip? Last spring, when I took a fortnight off."

"You went clear West, just to see her?"

"Mainly. Partly, too, to get back to the restfulness of the place where I never had any troubles. I've kept the little shack I used to own; pay a local chap named Mindle to keep it in shape. So I just put in a week of quiet there."

"You're a queer chap, Ban. And a loyal one."

"If I weren't loyal to Camilla Van Arsdale —" said Banneker, and left the implication unconcluded.

"Another friend from your picturesque past is down below," said Edmonds, and named Gardner.

"Lord! That fellow nearly cost me my life, last time we met," laughed Banneker. Then his face altered. Pain drew its sharp lines there, pain and the longing of old memories still unassuaged. "Just the same, I'll be glad to see him."

He sought out the Californian, found him deep in talk with Guy Mallory of The Ledger, who had come in late, gave him hearty greeting, and looked about for Camilla Van Arsdale. She was supping in the center of a curiously assorted group, part of whom remembered the old romance of her life, and part of whom had identified her, by some chance, as Royce Melvin, the composer. All of them were paying court to her charm and intelligence. She made a place beside herself for Banneker.

"We've been discussing The Patriot, Ban," she said, "and Mr. Gaines has embalmed you, as an editorial writer, in the amber of one of his best epigrams."

The Great Gaines made a deprecating gesture. "My little efforts always sound better when I'm not present," he protested.

"To be the subject of any Gaines epigram, however stinging, is fame in itself," said Banneker.

"And no sting in this one. 'Attic salt and American pep,'" she quoted. "Isn't it truly spicy?"

Banneker bowed with half-mocking appreciation. "I fancy, though, that Mr. Gaines prefers his journalistic egg more *au naturel*."

"Sometimes," admitted the most famous of magazine editors, "I could dispense with some of the pep."

"I like the pep, too, Ban." Betty Raleigh, looking up from a seat where she sat talking to a squat and sensual-looking man, a dweller in the high places and cool serenities of advanced mathematics whom jocular-minded Nature had misdowered with the face of a satyr, interposed the suave candor of her voice. "I actually lick my lips over your editorials even where I least agree with them. But the rest of the paper — Oh, dear! It screeches."

"Modern life is such a din that one has to screech to be heard above it," said Banneker pleasantly.

"Isn't it the newspapers which make most of the din, though?" suggested the mathematician.

"Shouting against each other," said Gaines.

"Like Coney Island barkers for rival shows," put in Junior Masters.

"Just for variety how would it do to try the other tack and practice a careful but significant restraint?" inquired Betty.

"Wouldn't sell a ticket," declared Banneker.

"Still, if we all keep on yelling in the biggest type and hottest words we can find," pointed out Edmonds, "the effect will pall."

"Perhaps the measure of success is in finding something constantly more strident and startling than the other fellow's war whoop," surmised Masters.

"I have never particularly admired the steam calliope as a form of expression," observed Miss Van Arsdale.

"Ah!" said the actress, smiling, "but Royce Melvin doesn't make music for circuses."

"And a modern newspaper is a circus," pronounced the satyr-like scholar.

"Three-ring variety; all the latest stunts; list to the voice of the ballyhoo," said Masters.

"*Panem et circenses*," pursued the mathematician, pleased with his simile, "to appease the howling rabble. But it is mostly circus, and very little bread that our emperors of the news give us."

"We've got to feed what the animal eats," defended Banneker lightly.

"After having stimulated an artificial appetite," said Edmonds.

As the talk flowed on, Betty Raleigh adroitly drew Banneker out of the current of it. "Your Patriot needn't have screeched at me, Ban," she murmured in an injured tone.

"Did it, Betty? How, when, and where?"

"I thought you were horridly patronizing about the new piece, and quite unkind to me, for a friend."

"It wasn't my criticism, you know," he reminded her patiently. "I don't write the whole paper, though most of my acquaintances seem to think that I do. Any and all of it to which they take exception, at least."

"Of course, I know you didn't write it, or it wouldn't have been so stupid. I could stand anything except the charge that I've lost my naturalness and become conventional."

"You're like the man who could resist anything except temptation, my dear: you can stand anything except criticism," returned Banneker with a smile so friendly that there was no sting in the words. "You've never had enough of that. You're the spoiled pet of the critics."

"Not of this new one of yours. He's worse than Gurney. Who is he and where does he come from?"

"An inconsiderable hamlet known as Chicago. Name, Allan Haslett. Dramatic criticism out there is still so unsophisticated as to be intelligent as well as honest — at its best."

"Which it isn't here," commented the special pet of the theatrical reviewers.

"Well, I thought a good new man would be better than the good old ones. Less hampered by personal considerations. So I sent and got this one."

"But he isn't good. He's a horrid beast. We've been specially nice to him, on your account mostly — Ban, if you grin that way I shall hate you! I had Bezdek invite him to one of the rehearsal suppers and he wouldn't come. Sent word that theatrical suppers affected his eyesight when he came to see the play."

Banneker chuckled. "Just why I got him. He doesn't let the personal element prejudice him."

"He is prejudiced. And most unfair, Ban," said Betty in her

most seductive tones, "do call him down. Make him write something decent about us. Bez is fearfully upset."

Banneker sighed. "The curse of this business," he reflected aloud, "is that every one regards The Patriot as my personal toy for me or my friends to play with."

"This isn't play at all. It's very much earnest. Do be nice about it, Ban."

"Betty, do you remember a dinner party in the first days of our acquaintance, at which I told you that you represented one essential difference from all the other women there?"

"Yes. I thought you were terribly presuming."

"I told you that you were probably the only woman present who wasn't purchasable."

"Not understanding you as well as I do now, I was quite shocked. Besides, it was so unfair. Nearly all of them were most respectable married people."

"Bought by their most respectable husbands. Some of 'em bought away from other husbands. But I gave you credit for not being on that market — or any other. And now you're trying to corrupt my professional virtue."

"Ban! I'm not."

"What else is it when you try to use your influence to have me fire our nice, new critic?"

"If that's being corruptible, I wonder if any of us are incorruptible." She stretched upward an idle hand and fondled a spray of freesia that drooped against her cheek. "Ban; there's something I've been waiting to tell you. Tertius Marrineal wants to marry me."

"I've suspected as much. That would settle the obnoxious critic, wouldn't it! Though it's rather a roundabout way."

"Ban! You're beastly."

"Yes; I apologize," he replied quickly. "But — have I got to revise my estimate of you, Betty? I should hate to."

"Your estimate? Oh, as to purchasability. That's worse than what you've just said. Yet, somehow, I don't resent it. Because it's honest, I suppose," she said pensively. "No: it wouldn't be a — a market deal. I like Tertius. I like him a lot. I won't pretend that I'm madly in love with him. But —"

"Yes; I know," he said gently, as she paused, looking at him steadily, but with clouded eyes. He read into that "but" a world of opportunities; a theater of her own — the backing of a powerful newspaper — wealth — and all, if she so willed it, without interruption to her professional career.

"Would you think any the less of me?" she asked wistfully.

"Would you think any the less of yourself?" he countered.

The blossoming spray broke under her hand. "Ah, yes; that's the question after all, isn't it?" she murmured.

Meantime, Gardner, the eternal journalist, fostering a plan of his own, was gathering material from Guy Mallory who had come in late.

"What gets me," he said, looking over at the host, "is how he can do a day's work with all this social powwow going on."

"A day's? He does three days' work in every one. He's the hardest trained mind in the business. Why, he could sit down here this minute, in the middle of this room, and dictate an editorial while keeping up his end in the general talk. I've seen him do it."

"He must be a wonder at concentration."

"Concentration? If he didn't invent it, he perfected it. Tell you a story. Ban doesn't go in for any game except polo. One day some of the fellows at The Retreat got talking golf to him —"

"The Retreat? Good Lord! He doesn't belong to The Retreat, does he?"

"Yes; been a member for years. Well, they got him to agree to try it. Jim Tamson, the pro — he's supposed to be the best instructor in America — was there then. Banneker went out to the first tee, a 215-yard hole, watched Jim perform his show-'em-how swing, asked a couple of questions. 'Eye on the ball,' says Jim. 'That's nine tenths of it. The rest is hitting it easy and following through. Simple and easy,' says Jim, winking to himself. Banneker tries two or three clubs to see which feels easiest to handle, picks out a driving-iron, and slams the ball almost to the edge of the green. Chance? Of course, there was some luck in it. But it was mostly his everlasting ability to keep his attention focused. Jim almost collapsed. 'First time I ever saw a beginner that didn't top,' says he. 'You'll make a golfer, Mr. Banneker.'

'Not me,' says Ban. 'This game is too easy. It doesn't interest me.' He hands Jim a twenty-dollar bill, thanks him, goes in and has his bath, and has never touched a golf-stick since."

Gardner had been listening with a kindling eye. He brought his fist down on his knee. "You've told me something!" he exclaimed.

"Going to try it out on your own game?"

"Not about golf. About Banneker. I've been wondering how he managed to establish himself as an individual figure in this big town. Now I begin to see it. It's publicity; that's what it is. He's got the sense of how to make himself talked about. He's picturesque. I'll bet Banneker's first and last golf shot is a legend in the clubs yet, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," confirmed Mallory. "But do you really think that he reasoned it all out on the spur of the moment?"

"Oh, reasoned; probably not. It's instinctive, I tell you. And the twenty to the professional was a touch of genius. Tamson will never stop talking about it. Can't you hear him, telling it to his fellow pros? 'Golf's too easy for me,' he says, 'and hands me a double sawbuck! Did ye ever hear the like!' And so the legend is built up. It's a great thing to become a local legend. I know, for I've built up a few of 'em myself. . . . I suppose the gun-play on the river-front gave him his start at it and the rest came easy."

"Ask him. He'll probably tell you," said Mallory. "At least, he'll be interested in your theory."

Gardner strolled over to Banneker's group, not for the purpose of adopting Mallory's suggestion, for he was well satisfied with his own diagnosis, but to congratulate him upon the rising strength of The Patriot. As he approached, Miss Van Arsdale, in response to a plea from Betty Raleigh, went to the piano, and the dwindled crowd settled down into silence. For music, at The House With Three Eyes, was invariably the sort of music that people listen to; that is, the kind of people whom Banneker gathered around him.

After she had played, Miss Van Arsdale declared that she must go, whereupon Banneker insisted upon taking her to her

hotel. To her protests against dragging him away from his own party, he retorted that the party could very well run itself without him; his parties often did, when he was specially pressed in his work. Accepting this, his friend elected to walk; she wanted to hear more about The Patriot. What did she think of it, he asked.

"I don't expect you to like it," he added.

"That doesn't matter. I do tremendously admire your editorials. They're beautifully done; the perfection of clarity. But the rest of the paper — I can't see you in it."

"Because I'm not there, as an individual."

He expounded to her his theory of journalism. That was a just characterization of Junior Masters, he said: the three-ringed circus. He, Banneker, would run any kind of a circus they wanted, to catch and hold their eyes; the sensational acts, the clowns of the funny pages, the blare of the bands, the motion, the color, and the spangles; all to beguile them into reading and eventually to thinking.

"But we haven't worked it out yet, as we should. What I'm really aiming at is a saturated solution, as the chemists say: Not a saturated solution of circulation, for that isn't possible, but a saturated solution of influence. If we can't put The Patriot into every man's house, we ought to be able to put it into every man's mind. All things to all men: that's the formula. We're far from it yet, but we're on the road. And in the editorials, I'm making people stir their minds about real things who never before developed a thought beyond the everyday, mechanical processes of living."

"To what end?" she asked doubtfully.

"Does it matter? Isn't the thinking, in itself, end enough?"

"Brutish thinking if it's represented in your screaming headlines."

"Predigested news. I want to preserve all their brain-power for my editorial page. And, oh, how easy I make it for them! Thoughts of one syllable."

"And you use your power over their minds to incite them to discontent."

"Certainly."

"But that's dreadful, Ban! To stir up bitterness and rancor among people."

"Don't you be misled by cant, Miss Camilla," adjured Banneker. "The contented who have everything to make them content have put a stigma on discontent. They'd have us think it a crime. It isn't. It's a virtue."

"Ban! A virtue?"

"Well; isn't it? Call it by the other name, ambition. What then?"

Miss Van Arsdale pondered with troubled eyes. "I see what you mean," she confessed. "But the discontent that arises within one's self is one thing; the 'divine discontent.' It's quite another to foment it for your own purposes in the souls of others."

"That depends upon the purpose. If the purpose is to help the others, through making their discontent effective to something better, isn't it justified?"

"But isn't there always the danger of making a profession of discontent?"

"That's a shrewd hit," confessed Banneker. "I've suspected that Marrineal means to capitalize it eventually, though I don't know just how. He's a secret sort of animal, Marrineal."

"But he gives you a free hand?" she asked.

"He has to," said Banneker simply.

Camilla Van Arsdale sighed. "It's success, Ban. Isn't it?"

"Yes. It's success. In its kind."

"Is it happiness?"

"Yes. Also in its kind."

"The real kind? The best kind?"

"It's satisfaction. I'm doing what I want to do."

She sighed. "I'd hoped for something more."

He shook his head. "One can't have everything."

"Why not?" she demanded almost fiercely. "You ought to have. You're made for it." After a pause she added: "Then it isn't Betty Raleigh. I'd hoped it was. I've been watching her. There's character there, Ban, as well as charm."

"She has other interests. No; it isn't Betty."

"Ban, there are times when I could hate her," broke out Miss Van Arsdale.

"Who? Betty?"

"You know whom well enough."

"I stand corrected in grammar as well as fact," he said lightly.

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes. I see her occasionally. Not often."

"Does she come here?"

"She has been."

"And her husband?"

"No."

"Ban, aren't you ever going to get over it?"

He looked at her silently.

"No; you won't. There are a few of us like that. God help us!" said Camilla Van Arsdale.

## Chapter II

Others than Banneker's friends and frequenters now evinced symptoms of interest in his influence upon his environment. Approve him you might, or disapprove him; the palpable fact remained that he wielded a growing power. Several promising enterprises directed at the City Treasury had aborted under destructive pressure from his pen. A once impregnably cohesive ring of Albany legislators had disintegrated with such violence of mutual recrimination that prosecution loomed imminent, because of a two weeks' "vacation" of Banneker's at the State Capitol. He had hunted some of the lawlessness out of the Police Department and bludgeoned some decent housing measures through the city councils. Politically he was deemed faithless and unreliable which meant that, as an independent, he had ruined some hopefully profitable combinations in both parties. Certain men, high up in politics and finance at the point where they overlap, took thoughtful heed of him. How could they make him useful? Or, at least, prevent him from being harmful?"

No less a potentate than Poultney Masters had sought illumination from Willis Enderby upon the subject in the days when people in street-cars first began to rustle through the sheets of The Patriot, curious to see what the editorial had to say to them that day.

"What do you think of him?" began the magnate.

"Able," grunted the other.

"If he weren't, I wouldn't be troubling my head about him. What else? Dangerous?"

"As dangerous as he is upright. Exactly."

"Now, I wonder what the devil you mean by that, Enderby," said the financier testily. "Dangerous as long as he's upright? Eh? And dangerous to what?"

"To anything he goes after. He's got a following. I might almost say a blind following."

"Got a boss, too, hasn't he?"

"Marrineal? Ah, I don't know how far Marrineal interferes. And I don't know Marrineal."

"Upright, too; that one?" The sneer in Masters's heavy voice was palpable.

"You consider that no newspaper can be upright," the lawyer interpreted.

"I've bought 'em and bluffed 'em and stood 'em in a corner to be good," returned the other simply. "What would you expect my opinion to be?"

"The Sphere, among them?" queried the lawyer.

"Damn The Sphere!" exploded the other. "A dirty, muck-grubbing, lying, crooked rag."

"Your actual grudge against it is not for those latter qualities, though," pointed out Enderby. "On questions where it conflicts with your enterprises, it's straight enough. That's it's defect. Upright equals dangerous. You perceive?"

Masters shrugged the problem away with a thick and ponderous jerk of his shoulders. "What's young Banneker after?" he demanded.

"You ought to know him as well as I. He's a sort of protégé of yours, isn't he?"

"At The Retreat, you mean? I put him in because he looked to be polo stuff. Now the young squirt won't practice enough to be certain team material."

"Found a bigger game."

"Umph! But what's in back of it?"

"It's the game for the game's sake with him, I suspect. I can only tell you that, wherever I've had contact with him, he has been perfectly straightforward."

"Maybe. But what about this anarchistic stuff of his?"

"Oh, anarchistic! You mean his attacks on Wall Street? The Stock Exchange isn't synonymous with the Constitution of the United States, you know, Masters. Do moderate your language."

"Now you're laughing at me, damn you, Enderby."

"It's good for you. You ought to laugh at yourself more. Ask Banneker what he's at. Very probably he'll laugh at you inside. But he'll answer you."

"That reminds me. He had an editorial last week that stuck to me. 'It is the bitter laughter of the people that shakes thrones. Have a care, you money kings, not to become too ridiculous!' Isn't that socialist-anarchist stuff?"

"It's very young stuff. But it's got a quality, hasn't it?"

"Oh, hell, yes; quality!" rumbled the profane old man. "Well, I will tackle your young prodigy one of these days."

Which, accordingly, he did, encountering, some days later, Banneker in the reading-room at The Retreat.

"What are you up to; making trouble with that editorial screed of yours?" he growled at the younger man.

Banneker smiled. He accepted that growl from Poultney Masters, not because Masters was a great and formidable figure in the big world, but because beneath the snarl there was a quality of — no, not of friendliness, but of man-to-man approach.

"No. I'm trying to cure trouble, not make it."

"Umph! Queer idea of curing. Here we are in the midst of good times, everywhere, and you talk about — what was the stuff? — oh, yes: 'The grinning mask of prosperity, beneath which Want searches with haggard and threatening eyes for the crust denied.' Fine stuff!"

"Not mine. I don't write as beautifully as all that. It's quoted from a letter. But I'll take the responsibility, since I quoted it. There's some truth in it, you know."

"Not a hair's-weight. If you fill the minds of the ignorant with that sort of thing, where shall we end?"

"If you fill the minds of the ignorant, they will no longer be ignorant."

"Then they'll be above their class and their work. Our whole trouble is in that; people thinking they're too good for the sort of work they're fitted for."

"Aren't they too good if they can think themselves into something better?"

Poultney Masters delivered himself of a historical profundity. "The man who first had the notion of teaching the mass of people to read will have something to answer for."

"Destructive, isn't it?" said Banneker, looking up quickly.

"Now, you want to go farther. You want to teach 'em to think."

"Exactly. Why not?"

"Why not? Why, because, you young idiot, they'll think wrong."

"Very likely. At first. We all had to spell wrong before we spelled right. What if people do think wrong? It's the thinking that's important. Eventually they'll think right."

"With the newspapers to guide them?" There was a world of scorn in the magnate's voice.

"Some will guide wrong. Some will guide right. The most I hope to do is to teach 'em a little to use their minds. Education and a fair field. To find out and to make clear what is found; that's the business of a newspaper as I see it."

"Tittle-tattle. Tale-mongering," was Masters's contemptuous qualification.

"A royal mission," laughed Banneker. "I call the Sage to witness. 'But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.'"

"But they've got to be kings," retorted the other quickly. "It's a tricky business, Banneker. Better go in for polo. We need you." He lumbered away, morose and growling, but turned back to call over his shoulder: "Read your own stuff when you get up to-morrow and see if polo isn't a better game and a cleaner."

What the Great of the city might think of his journalistic achievement troubled Banneker but little, so long as they thought of it at all, thereby proving its influence; the general public was his sole arbiter, except for the opinions of the very few whose approval he really desired, Io Eyre, Camilla Van Arsdale, and more remotely the men for whose own standards he maintained a real respect, such as Willis Enderby and Gaines. Determined to make Miss Van Arsdale see his point of view, as well as to assure himself of hers, he had extracted from her a promise that she would visit The Patriot office before she returned to the West. Accordingly, on a set morning she arrived on her trip of inspection, tall, serene, and, in her aloof *genre*, beautiful, an alien figure in the midst of that fevered and deliri-

ous energy. He took her through the plant, elucidating the mechanical processes of the daily miracle of publication, more far-reaching than was ever any other voice of man, more ephemeral than the day of the briefest butterfly. Throughout, the visitor's pensive eyes kept turning from the creature to the creator, until, back in the trim quietude of his office, famed as the only orderly working-room of journalism, she delivered her wondering question:

"And *you* have made all this, Ban?"

"At least I've remade it."

She shook her head. "No; as I told you before, I can't see you in it."

"You mean, it doesn't express me. It isn't meant to.'

"Whom does it express, then? Mr. Marrineal?"

"No. It isn't an expression at all in that sense. It's a — a response. A response to the demand of hundreds of thousands of people who have never had a newspaper made for them before."

"An echo of *vox populi?* Does that excuse its sins?"

"I'm not putting it forth as an excuse. Is it really sins or only bad taste that offends you?"

"Clever, Ban. And true in a measure. But insincerity is more than bad taste. It's one of the primal sins."

"You find The Patriot insincere?"

"Can I find it anything else, knowing you?"

"Ah, there you go wrong again, Miss Camilla. As an expression of my ideals, the news part of the paper would be insincere. I don't like it much better than you do. But I endure it; yes, I'll be frank and admit that I even encourage it, because it gives me wider scope for the things I want to say. Sincere things. I've never yet written in my editorial column anything that I don't believe from the bottom of my soul. Take that as a basis on which to judge me."

"My dear Ban! I don't want to judge you."

"I want you to," he cried eagerly. "I want your judgment and your criticism. But you must see what I'm aiming for. Miss Camilla, I'm making people stir their minds and think who never before had a thought beyond the everyday processes of life."

"For your own purposes? Thought, as you manipulate it, might be a high-explosive. Have you thought of using it in that way?"

"If I found a part of the social edifice that had to be blown to pieces, I might."

"Take care that you don't involve us all in the crash. Meantime, what is the rest of your editorial page; a species of sedative to lull their minds? Who is Evadne Ellington?"

"One of our most prominent young murderesses."

"And you let her sign a column on your page?"

"Oh, she's a highly moral murderess. Killed her lover in defense of her honor, you know. Which means that she shot him when he got tired of her. A sobbing jury promptly acquitted her, and now she's writing 'Warnings to Young Girls.' They're most improving and affecting, I assure you. We look after that."

"Ban! I hate to have you so cynical."

"Not at all," he protested. "Ask the Prevention of Vice people and the criminologists. They'll tell you that Evadne's column is a real influence for good among the people who read and believe it."

"What class is Reformed Rennigan's sermon aimed at?" she inquired, with wrinkling nostrils. "'Soaking it to Satan'; is that another regular feature?"

"Twice a week. It gives us a Y. M. C. A. circulation that is worth a good deal to us. Outside of my double column, the page is a sort of forum. I'll take anything that is interesting or authoritative. For example, if Royce Melvin had something of value to say to the public about music, where else could she find so wide a hearing as through The Patriot?"

"No, I thank you," returned his visitor dryly.

"No? Are you sure? What is your opinion of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' as a national song?"

"It's dreadful."

"Why?"

"For every reason. The music misfits the words. It's beyond the range of most voices. The harmonies are thin. No crowd in the world can sing it. What is the value or inspiration of a national song that the people can't sing?"

"Ask it of The Patriot's public. I'll follow it up editorially; 'Wanted; A Song for America.'"

"I will," she answered impulsively. Then she laughed. "Is that the way you get your contributors?"

"Often, as the spider said to the fly," grinned Banneker the shameless. "Take a thousand words or more and let us have your picture."

"No. Not that. I've seen my friends' pictures too often in your society columns. By the way, how comes it that a paper devoted to the interests of the common people maintains that aristocratic feature?"

"Oh, the common people eat it alive. Russell Edmonds is largely responsible for keeping it up. You should hear his theory. It's ingenious. I'll send for him."

Edmonds, who chanced to be at his desk, entered the editorial den with his tiny pipe between his teeth, and, much disconcerted at finding a lady there, hastily removed it until Miss Van Arsdale suggested its restitution.

"What? The society page?" said he. "Yes; I was against dropping it. You see, Miss Van Arsdale, I'm a Socialist in belief."

"Is there a pun concealed in that or are you serious, Mr. Edmonds?"

"Serious. I'm always that on the subjects of Socialism and The Patriot."

"Then you must explain if I'm to understand."

"By whom is society news read? By two classes," expounded the veteran; "those whose names appear, and those who are envious of those whose names appear. Well, we're after the envious."

"Still I don't see. With what purpose?"

"Jim Simpson, who has just got his grocery bill for more than he can pay, reads a high-colored account of Mrs. Stumpley-Triggs's aquatic dinner served in the hundred-thousand-dollar swimming-pool on her Westchester estate. That makes Jim think."

"You mean that it makes him discontented."

"Well, discontent is a mighty leaven."

Miss Van Arsdale directed her fine and serious eyes upon Banneker. "So it comes back to the cult of discontent. Is that Mr. Marrineal's formula, too, Mr. Edmonds?"

"Underneath all his appearance of candor, Marrineal's a secret animal," said Edmonds.

"Does he leave you a free hand with your editorials, Ban?" inquired the outsider.

"Absolutely."

"Watches the circulation only," said Edmonds. "Thus far," he added.

"You're looking for an ulterior motive. then," interpreted Miss Van Arsdale.

"I'm looking for whatever I can find in Marrineal, Miss Van Arsdale," confessed the patriarch of the office. "As vet I haven't found much."

"I have," said Banneker. "I've discovered his theory of journalism. We three, Edmonds, Marrineal, and I, regard this business from three diverse viewpoints. To Edmonds it's a vocation and a rostrum. He wants really, under his guise as the most far-seeing news man of his time, to call sinners against society to repentance, or to force repentance down their throats. There's a good deal of the stern evangelist about you, you know, Pop."

"And you?" The other's smile seemed enmeshed in the dainty spiral of smoke brooding above his pursed lips.

"Oh, I'm more the pedagogue. With me, too, the game is a vocation. But it's a different one. I'd like to marshal men's minds as a generalissimo marshals armies."

"In the bonds of your own discipline?" asked Miss Van Arsdale.

"If I could chain a mind I'd be the most splendid tyrant of history. No. Free leadership of the free is good enough."

"If Marrineal will leave you free," commented the veteran. "What's your diagnosis of Marrineal, then?"

"A priest of Baal."

"With The Patriot in the part of Baal?"

"Not precisely The Patriot. Publicity, rather, of which The

Patriot is merely the instrument. Marrineal's theory of publicity is interesting. It may even be true. Substantially it is this: All civilized Americans fear and love print; that is to say, Publicity, for which read Baal. They fear it for what it may do to them. They love and fawn on it for what it may do for them. It confers the boon of glory and launches the bolts of shame. Its favorites, made and anointed from day to day, are the blessed of their time. Those doomed by it are the outcasts. It sits in momentary judgment, and appeal from its decisions is too late to avail anything to its victims. A species of auto-juggernaut, with Marrineal at the wheel."

"What rubbish!" said Miss Van Arsdale with amused scorn.

"Oh, because you've nothing to ask or fear from Baal. Yet even you would use it, for your musical preachment."

As he spoke, he became aware of Edmonds staring moodily and with pinched lips at Miss Van Arsdale. To the mind's eye of the old stager had flashed a sudden and astounding vision of all that pride of womanhood and purity underlying the beauty of the face, overlaid and fouled by the inky vomit of Baal of the printing-press, as would have come to pass had not he, Edmonds, obstructed the vengeance.

"I can imagine nothing printed," said the woman who had loved Willis Enderby, "that could in any manner influence my life."

"Fortunate you!" Edmonds wreathed his little congratulation in festoons of light vapor. "But you live in a world of your own making. Marrineal is reckoning on the world which lives and thinks largely in terms of what its neighbor thinks of it."

"He once said to me," remarked Banneker, "that the desire to get into or keep out of print could be made the master-key to new and undreamed-of powers of journalism if one had the ability to find a formula for it."

"I'm not sure that I understand what he means," said Miss Van Arsdale, "but it has a sinister sound."

"Are Baal's other names Bribery and Blackmail?" glowered Edmonds.

"There has never been a hint of any illegitimate use of the

paper, so far as I can discover. Yet it's pretty plain to me that he intends to use it as an instrument."

"As soon as we've made it strong enough," supplied Edmonds.

"An instrument of what?" inquired Miss Van Arsdale.

"Power for himself. Political, I suppose."

"Does he want office?" she asked.

"Perhaps. Perhaps he prefers the deeper-lying power to make and unmake politicians. We've done it already in a few cases. That's Edmonds's specialty. I'll know within a few days what Marrineal wants, if I can get a showdown. He and I are coming to a new basis of finance."

"Yes; he thinks he can't afford to keep on paying you by circulation. You're putting on too much." This from Edmonds.

"That's what he got me here for. However, I don't really believe he can. I'm eating up what should be the paper's legitimate profits. And yet" — he smiled radiantly — "there are times when I don't see how I'm going to get along with what I have. It's pretty absurd, isn't it, to feel pinched on fifty thousand a year, when I did so well at Manzanita on sixty a month?"

"It's a fairy-tale," declared Miss Van Arsdale. "I knew that you were going to arrive sooner or later, Ban. But this isn't an arrival. It's a triumph."

"Say rather it's a feat of balancing," he propounded. "A tight-rope stunt on a gilded rope. Failure on one side; debt on the other. Keep going like the devil to save yourself from falling."

"What is it making of him, Mr. Edmonds?" Banneker's oldest friend turned her limpid and anxious regard upon his closest friend.

"A power. Oh, it's real enough, all this empire of words that crumbles daily. It leaves something behind, a little residue of thought, ideals, convictions. What do you fear for him?"

"Cynicism," she breathed uneasily.

"It's the curse of the game. But it doesn't get the worker who feels his work striking home."

"Do you see any trace of cynicism in the paper?" asked Banneker curiously.

"All this blaring and glaring and froth and distortion," she replied, sweeping her hand across the issue which lay on the desk before her. "Can you do that sort of thing and not become that sort of thing?"

"Ask Edmonds," said Banneker.

"Thirty years I've been in this business," said the veteran slowly. "I suppose there are few of its problems and perplexities that I haven't been up against. And I tell you, Miss Van Arsdale, all this froth and noise and sensationalism doesn't matter. It's an offense to taste, I know. But back of it is the big thing that we're trying to do; to enlist the ignorant and helpless and teach them to be less ignorant and helpless. If fostering the political ambitions of a Marrineal is part of the price, why, I'm willing to pay it, so long as the paper keeps straight and doesn't sell itself for bribe money. After all, Marrineal can ride to his goal only on our chariot. The Patriot is an institution now. You can't alter an institution, not essentially. You get committed to it, to the thing you've made yourself. Ban and I have made the new Patriot, not Marrineal. Even if he got rid of us, he couldn't change the paper; not for a long time and only very gradually. The following that we've built up would be too strong for him."

"Isn't it too strong for you two?" asked the doubting woman-soul.

"No. We understand it because we made it."

"Frankenstein once said something like that," she murmured.

"It isn't a monster," rumbled Edmonds. "Sometimes I think it's a toy dog, with Ban's ribbon around its cute little neck. I'll answer for Ban, Miss Van Arsdale."

The smoke of his minute pipe went up, tenuous and graceful, incense devoted to the unseen God behind the strangely patterned curtain of print; to Baal who was perhaps even then grinning down upon his unsuspecting worshipers.

But Banneker, moving purposefully amidst that vast phantasmagoria of pulsing print, wherein all was magnified, distorted, perverted to the claims of a gross and rabid public appetite, dreamed his pure, untainted dream; the conception of his newspaper as a voice potent enough to reach and move all; dominant

enough to impose its underlying ideal; confident enough of righteousness to be free of all silencing and control. That voice should supply the long unsatisfied hunger of the many for truth uncorrupted. It should enunciate straightly, simply, without reservation, the daily verities destined to build up the eternal structure. It should be a religion of seven days a week, set forth by a thousand devoted preachers for a million faithful hearers.

Camilla Van Arsdale had partly read his dream, and could have wept for it and him.

Io Eyre had begun to read it, and her heart went out to him anew. For this was the test of success.

## Chapter III

It was one of those mornings of coolness after cloying heat when even the crowded, reeking, frowzy metropolis wakes with a breath of freshness in its nostrils. Independent of sleep as ever, Banneker was up and footing it briskly for the station before eight o'clock, for Camilla Van Arsdale was returning to Manzanita, having been ordered back to her seclusion with medical science's well-considered verdict wrapped up in tactful words to bear her company on the long journey. When she would be ordered on a longer journey by a mightier Authority, medical science forbore to specify; but in the higher interests of American music it was urgently pressed upon her that she be abstemious in diet, niggardly of work, careful about fatigue and excitement, and in general comport herself in such manner as to deprive the lease of life remaining to her of most of its savor and worth. She had told Ban that the physicians thought her condition favorable.

Invalidism was certainly not suggested in her erect bearing and serene face as she moved about her stateroom setting in order the books, magazines, flowers, and candy, with which Banneker had sought to fortify her against the tedium of the trip. As the time for departure drew near, they fell into and effortfully maintained that meaningless, banal, and jerky talk which is the inevitable concomitant of long partings between people who, really caring for each other, can find nothing but commonplaces wherewith to ease their stress of mind. Miss Van Arsdale's common sense came to the rescue.

"Go away, my dear," she said, with her understanding smile. "Don't think that you're obliged to cling to the dragging minutes. It's an ungraceful posture. . . . Ban! What makes you look like that?"

"I thought — I heard —"

A clear voice outside said, "Then it must be this one." There was a decisive tap on the door. "May I come in?" . . . "Come in,"

responded Miss Van Arsdale. "Bring them here, porter," directed the voice outside, and Io entered followed by an attendant almost hidden in a huge armful of such roses as are unpurchasable even in the most luxurious of stores.

"I've looted our conservatory," said she. "Papa will slay me. They'll last to Chicago."

After an almost imperceptible hesitation she kissed the older woman. She gave her hand to Banneker. "I knew I should find you here."

"Any other woman of my acquaintance would have said, 'Who would have expected to find you here!'" commented Miss Van Arsdale.

"Yes? I suppose so. But we've never been on that footing, Ban and I." Io's tone was casual; almost careless.

"I thought that you were in the country," said Banneker.

"So we are. I drove up this morning to bid Miss Van Arsdale *bon voyage*, and all the luck in the world. I suppose we three shall meet again one of these days."

"You prophesy in the most matter-of-fact tone a gross improbability," observed Miss Van Arsdale.

"Oh, our first meeting was the gross improbability," retorted the girl lightly. "After that anything might be logical. *Au revoir*."

"Go with her, Ban," said Miss Camilla.

"It isn't leaving time yet," he protested. "There's five whole minutes."

"Yes; come with me, Ban," said Io tranquilly.

Camilla Van Arsdale kissed his cheek, gave him a little, half-motherly pat, said, "Keep on making me proud of you," in her even, confident tones, and pushed him out of the door.

Ban and Io walked down the long platform in a thoughtful silence which disconcerted neither of them. Io led the way out of it.

"At half-past four," she stated, "I had a glass of milk and one cracker."

"Where do you want to breakfast?"

"Thanking you humbly, sir, for your kind invitation, the nearer the better. Why not here?"

They found a table in the well-appointed railroad restaurant and ordered. Over her honey-dew melon Io asked musingly:

"What do you suppose she thinks of us?"

"Miss Camilla? What should she think?"

"What, indeed? What do we think, ourselves?"

"Has it any importance?" he asked gloomily.

"And that's rather rude," she chided. "Anything that I think should, by courtesy, be regarded as important.... Ban, how often have we seen each other?"

"Since I came to New York, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Nine times."

"So many? And how much have we talked together? All told; in time, I mean."

"Possibly a solid hour. Not more."

"It hasn't made any difference, has it? There's been no interruption. We've never let the thread drop. We've never lost touch. Not really."

"No. We've never lost touch."

"You needn't repeat it as if it were a matter for mourning and repentance. I think it rather wonderful.... Take our return from the train, all the way down without a word. Were you sulking, Ban?"

"No. You know I wasn't."

"Of course I know it. It was simply that we didn't need to talk. There's no one else in the world like that.... How long is it? Three years — four — more than four years.

'We twain once well in sunder
What will the mad gods do
For hate with me, I wond —'"

"My God, Io! Don't!"

"Oh, Ban; I'm sorry! Have I hurt you? I was dreaming back into the old world."

"And I've been trying all these years not to."

"Is the reality really better? No; don't answer that! I don't want you to. Answer me something else. About Betty Raleigh."

"What about her?"

"If I were a man I should find her an irresistible sort of person. Entirely aside from her art. Are you going to marry her, Ban?"

"No."

"Tell me why not."

"For one reason because she doesn't want to marry me."

"Have you asked her? It's none of my business. But I don't believe you have. Tell me this; would you have asked her, if it hadn't been for — if Number Three had never been wrecked in the cut? You see the old railroad terms you taught me still cling. Would you?"

"How do I know? If the world hadn't changed under my feet, and the sky over my head —"

"Is it so changed?" Do the big things, the real things, ever change?...Don't answer that, either. Ban, if I'll go out of your life now, and stay out, *honestly*, will you marry Betty Raleigh and — and live happy ever after?"

"Would you want me to?"

"Yes. Truly. And I'd hate you both forever."

"Betty Raleigh is going to marry some one else."

"No! I thought — people said — Are you sorry, Ban?"

"Not for myself. I think he's the wrong man for her."

"Yes; that would be a change of the earth underfoot and the sky overhead, if one cared," she mused. "And I said they didn't change."

"Don't they!" retorted Banneker bitterly. "You are married."

"I have been married," she corrected, with an air of amiable rectification. "It was a wise thing to do. Everybody said so. It didn't last. Nobody thought it would. I didn't really think so myself."

"Then why in Heaven's name —"

"Oh, let's not talk about it now. Some other time, perhaps. Say next time we meet; five or six months from now.... No; I won't tease you any more, Ban. It won't be that. It won't be long. I'll tell you the truth: I'd heard a lot about you and Betty Raleigh, and I got to know her and I hoped it would be a go. I did; truly, Ban. I owed you that chance of happiness. I

took mine, you see; only it wasn't happiness that I gambled for. Something else. Safety. The stakes are usually different for men and women. So now you know.... Well, if you don't, you've grown stupid. And I don't want to talk about it any more. I want to talk about — about The Patriot. I read it this morning while I was waiting; your editorial. Ban" — she drew a derisive mouth — "I was shocked."

"What was it? Politics?" asked Banneker, who, turning out his editorials several at a time, seldom bothered to recall on what particular day any one was published. "You wouldn't be expected to like our politics."

"Not politics. It is about Harvey Wheelwright."

Banneker was amused. "The immortally popular Wheelwright. We're serializing his new novel, 'Satiated with Sin,' in the Sunday edition. My idea. It'll put on circulation where we most need it."

"Is that any reason why you should exploit him as if he were the foremost living novelist?"

"Certainly. Besides, he is, in popularity."

"But, Ban; his stuff is awful! If this latest thing is like the earlier. ["Worse," murmured Banneker.] And you're writing about him as if he were — well, Conrad and Wells rolled into one."

"He's better than that, for the kind of people that read him. It's addressed to them, that editorial. All the stress is on his piety, his popularity, his power to move men's minds; there isn't a word that even touches on the domain of art or literary skill."

"It has that effect."

"Ah! That's my art," chuckled Banneker. "*That*'s literary skill, if you choose!"

"Do you know what I call it? I call it treason."

His mind flashed to meet hers. She read comprehension in his changed face and the shadow in her eyes, lambent and profound, deepened.

"Treason to the world that we two made for ourselves out there," she pursued evenly.

"You shattered it."

"To the Undying Voices."

"You stilled them, for me."

"Oh, Ban! Not that!" A sudden, little sob wrenched at her throat. She half thrust out a hand toward him, and withdrew it, to cup and hold her chin in the old, thoughtful posture that plucked at his heart with imperious memories. "Don't they sing for you any more?" begged Io, wistful as a child forlorn for a dream of fairies dispelled.

"I wouldn't let them. They all sang of you."

She sighed, but about the tender corners of her lips crept the tremor of a smile. Instantly she became serious again.

"If you still heard the Voices, you could never have written that editorial. . . . What I hate about it is that it has charm; that it imparts charm to a — to a debasing thing."

"Oh, come, Io!" protested the victim of this criticism, more easily. "Debasing? Why, Wheelwright is considered the most uplifting of all our literary morality-improvers."

Io amplified and concluded her critique briefly and viciously. "A slug!"

"No; seriously. I'm not sure that he doesn't inculcate a lot of good in his way. At least he's always on the side of the angels."

"What kind of angels? Tinsel seraphs with paint on their cheeks, playing rag-time harps out of tune! There's a sickly slaver of sentiment over everything he touches that would make any virtue nauseous."

"Don't you want a job as a literary critic? Our Special Reviewer, Miss Io Wel — Mrs. Delavan Eyre," he concluded, in a tone from which the raillery had flattened out.

At that bald betrayal, Io's color waned slightly. She lifted her water-glass and sipped at it. When she spoke again it was as if an inner scene had been shifted.

"What did you come to New York for?"

"Success."

"As in all the fables. And you've found it. It was almost too easy, wasn't it?"

"Indeed, not. It was touch and go."

"Would you have come but for me?"

He stared at her, considering, wondering.

"Remember," she adjured him; "success was my prescription. Be flattering for once. Let me think that I'm responsible for the miracle."

"Perhaps. I couldn't stay out there — afterward. The loneliness..."

"I didn't want to leave you loneliness," she burst out passionately under her breath. "I wanted to leave you memory and ambition and the determination to succeed."

"For what?"

"Oh, no; no!" She answered the harsh thought subtending his query. "Not for myself. Not for any pride. I'm not cheap, Ban."

"No; you're not cheap."

"I would have kept my distance.... It was quite true what I said to you about Betty Raleigh. It was not success alone that I wanted for you; I wanted happiness, too. I owed you that — after my mistake."

He caught up the last word. "You've admitted to yourself, then, that it was a mistake?"

"I played the game," she retorted. "One can't always play right. But one can always play fair."

"Yes; I know your creed of sportsmanship. There are worse religions."

"Do you think I played fair with you, Ban? After that night on the river?"

He was mute.

'Do you know why I didn't kiss you good-bye in the station? Not really kiss you, I mean, as I did on the island?"

"No."

"Because, if I had, I should never have had the strength to go away." She lifted her eyes to his. Her voice fell to a half whisper. "You understood, on the island?...What I meant?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't take me. I wonder. Ban, if it hadn't been for the light flashing in our eyes and giving us hope...?"

"How can I tell? I was dazed with the amazement and the

glory of it — of you. But — yes. My God, yes! And then? Afterward?"

"Could there have been any afterward?" she questioned dreamily. "Would we not just have waited for the river to sweep us up and carry us away? What other ending could there have been, so fitting?"

"Anyway," he said with a sudden savage jealousy, "whatever happened you would not have gone away to marry Eyre."

"Should I not? I'm by no means sure. You don't understand much of me, my poor Ban."

"How could you!" he burst out. "Would that have been —"

"Oh, I should have told him, of course. I'd have said, 'Del, there's been another man, a lover.' One could say those things to him."

"Would he have married you?"

"You wouldn't, would you?" she smiled. "All or nothing, Ban, for you. About Del, I don't know." She shrugged dainty shoulders. "I shouldn't have much cared."

"And would you have come back to me, Io?"

"Do you want me to say 'Yes'? You do want me to say 'Yes,' don't you, my dear? How can I tell?...Sooner or later, I suppose. Fate. The irresistible current. I am here now."

"Io." He leaned to her across the little table, his somber regard holding hers. "Why did you tell Camilla Van Arsdale that you would never divorce Eyre?"

"Because it's true."

"But why tell her? So that it should come back to me?"

She answered him straight and fearlessly. "Yes. I thought it would be easier for you to hear from her."

"Did you?" He sat staring past her at visions. It was not within Banneker's code, his sense of fair play in the game, to betray to Io his wonderment (shared by most of her own set) that she should have endured the affront of Del Eyre's openly flagitious life, even though she had herself implied some knowledge of it in her assumption that a divorce could be procured. However, Io met his reticence with characteristic candor.

"Of course I know about Del. We have a perfect understand-

ing. He's agreed to maintain the outward decencies, from now on. I don't consider that I've the right to ask more. You see, I shouldn't have married him... even though he understood that I wasn't really in love with him. We're friends; and we're going to remain friends. Just that. Del's a good sort," she added with a hint of pleading the cause of a misunderstood person. "He'd give me my divorce in a minute; even though he still cares — in his way. But there's his mother. She's a sort of latter-day saint; one of those rare people that you respect and love in equal parts; the only other one I know is Cousin Willis Enderby. She's an invalid, hopeless, and a Roman Catholic, and for me to divorce Del would poison the rest of her life. So I won't. I can't."

"She won't live forever," muttered Banneker.

"No. Not long, perhaps." There was pain and resolution in Io's eyes as they were lifted to meet his again. "There's another reason. I can't tell even you, Ban. The secret isn't mine. . . . I'm sorry."

"Haven't you any work to do to-day?" she asked after a pause, with a successful effect of lightness.

He roused himself, settled the check, and took her to her car, parked near by.

"Where do you go now?" he asked.

"Back to the country."

"When shall I see you again?"

"I wonder," said Io.

## Chapter IV

Panem et circenses; bread and the Big Show. The diagnosis of the satyr-like mathematician had been accurate. That same method whereby the tyrants of Rome had sought to beguile the restless and unthinking multitude, Banneker adopted to capture and lead the sensation-avid metropolitan public through his newspaper. As a facture, a creation made to the mind of the creator, The Patriot was Banneker's own. True, Marrineal reserved full control. But Marrineal, after a few months spent in anxious observation of his editor's headlong and revolutionary method, had taken the sales reports for his determinative guide and decided to give the new man full sway.

Circulation had gone up as water rises in a tube under irresistible pressure from beneath. Nothing like it had ever been known in local journalism. Barring some set-back, within four years of the time when Banneker's introductory editorial appeared, the paper would have eclipsed all former records. In less than two years it had climbed to third place, and already Banneker's salary, under the percentage agreement, was, in the words of the alliterative Gardner, whose article describing The House With Three Eyes and its owner had gone forth on the wings of a far-spreading syndicate, "a stupendous stipend."

Banneker's editorials pervaded and gave the keynote. With sublime self-confidence he had adopted the untried scheme of having no set and determined place for the editorial department. Sometimes, his page appeared in the middle of the paper; sometimes on the back; and once, when a most promising scheme of municipal looting was just about to be put through, he fired his blast from the front sheet in extra heavy, double-leaded type, displacing an international yacht race and a most titillating society scandal with no more explanation than was to be found in the opening sentence:

"This is more important to YOU, Mr. New Yorker, than any other news in to-day's issue."

"Where Banneker sits," Russell Edmonds was wont to remark between puffs, "is the head of the paper."

"Let 'em look for the stuff," said Banneker confidently. "They'll think all the more of it when they find it."

Often he used inset illustrations, not so much to give point to his preachments, as to render them easier of comprehension to the unthinking. And always he sought the utmost of sensationalism in caption and in type, employing italics, capitals, and even heavy-face letters with an effect of detonation.

"Jollies you along until he can see the white of your mind, and then fires his slug into your head, point-blank," Edmonds said.

With all this he had the high art to keep his style direct, unaffected, almost severe. No frills, no literary graces, no flashes of wit except an occasional restrained touch of sarcasm: the writing was in the purest style and of a classic simplicity. The typical reader of The Patriot had a friendly and rather patronizing feeling for the editorials: they were generally deemed quite ordinary, "common as an old shoe" (with an approving accent from the commentator), comfortably devoid of the intricate elegancies practiced by Banneker's editorial compeers. So they were read and absorbed, which was all that their writer hoped or wished for them. He was not seeking the bubble, reputation, but the solid satisfaction of implanting ideas in minds hitherto unaroused to mental processes, and training the resultant thought in his chosen way and to eventual though still vague purposes.

"They're beginning to imitate you, Ban," commented Russell Edmonds in the days of The Patriot's first surprising upward leap. "Flattery of your peers."

"Let 'em imitate," returned Banneker indifferently.

"Yes; they don't come very near to the original. It's a fundamental difference in style."

"It's a fundamental difference in aim."

"Aim?"

"They're writing at and for their owners; to make good with the boss. I'm writing at my public."

"I believe you're right. It's more difficult, though, isn't it, to write for a hundred thousand people than at one?"

"Not if you understand them from study at first hand, as I do. That's why the other fellows are five or ten-thousand-dollar men," said Banneker, quite without boastfulness "while I'm —"

"A fifty-thousand-dollar a year man," supplied Edmonds.

"Well, getting toward that figure. I'm on the target with the editorials and I'm going to hold on it. But our news policy is different. We still wobble there."

"What do you want! Look at the circulation. Isn't that good enough?"

"No. Every time I get into a street-car and see a passenger reading some other paper, I feel that we've missed fire," returned Banneker inexorably. "Pop, did you ever see an actress make up?"

"I've a general notion of the process."

"Find me a man who can make up news ready and rouged to go before the daily footlights as an actress makes up her face."

The veteran grunted. "Not to be found on Park Row."

"Probably not. Park Row is too deadly conventional."

One might suppose that the environment of religious journalism would be equally conventional. Yet it was from this department that the "find" eventually came, conducted by Edmonds. Edgar Severance, ten years older than Banneker, impressed the guiding spirit of The Patriot at first sight with a sense of inner certitude and serenity not in the least impaired by his shabbiness which had the redeeming merit of being clean.

"You're not a newspaper man?" said Banneker after the introduction. "What are you?"

"I'm a prostitute," answered the other equably.

Banneker smiled. "Where have you practiced your profession?"

"As assistant editor of Guidance. I write the blasphemous editorials which are so highly regarded by the sweetly simple souls that make up our *clientèle;* the ones which weekly give gratuitous advice to God."

"Did Mr. Edmonds find you there?"

"No," put in the veteran; "I traced him down through some popular scientific stuff in the Boston Sunday Star."

"Fake, all of it," proffered Severance. "Otherwise it wouldn't be popular."

"Is that your creed of journalism?" asked Banneker curiously.

"Largely."

"Why come to The Patriot, then? It isn't ours."

Severance raised his fine eyebrows, but contented himself with saying: "Isn't it? However, I didn't come. I was brought." He indicated Edmonds.

"He gave me more ideas on news-dressing," said the veteran, "than I'd pick up in a century on the Row."

"Ideas are what we're after. Where do you get yours, Mr. Severance, since you are not a practical newspaper man?"

"From talking with people, and seeing what the newspapers fail to do."

"Where were you before you went on Guidance?"

"Instructor at Harvard."

"And you practiced your — er — specified profession there, too?"

"Oh, no. I was partly respectable then.

"Why did you leave?"

"Drink."

"Ah? You don't build up much of a character for yourself as prospective employee."

"If I join The Patriot staff I shall probably disappear once a month or so on a spree."

"Why should you join The Patriot staff? That is what you fail to make clear to me."

"Reference, Mr. Russell Edmonds," returned the other negligently.

"You two aren't getting anywhere with all this chatter," growled the reference. "Come, Severance; talk turkey, as you did to me."

"I don't want to talk," objected the other in his gentle, scholarly accents. "I want to look about: to diagnose the trouble in the news department."

"What do you suspect the trouble to be?" asked Banneker.

"Oh, the universal difficulty. Lack of brains."

Banneker laughed, but without relish. "We pay enough for what we've got. It ought to be good quality."

"You pay not wisely but too well. My own princely emolument as a prop of piety is thirty-five dollars a week."

"Would you come here at that figure?"

"I should prefer forty. For a period of six weeks, on trial."

"As Mr. Edmonds seems to think it worth the gamble, I'll take you on. From to-day, if you wish. Go out and look around."

"Wait a minute," interposed Edmonds. "What's his title? How is his job to be defined?"

"Call him my representative in the news department. I'll pay his salary myself. If he makes good, I'll more than get it back."

Mr. Severance's first concern appeared to be to make himself popular. In the anomalous position which he occupied as representative between two mutually jealous departments, this was no easy matter. But his quiet, contained courtesy, his tentative, almost timid, way of offering suggestions or throwing out hints which subsequently proved to have definite and often surprising value, his retiring willingness to waive any credit in favor of whosoever might choose to claim it, soon gave him an assured if inconspicuous position. His advice was widely sought. As an immediate corollary a new impress made itself felt in the daily columns. With his quick sensitiveness Banneker apprehended the change. It seemed to him that the paper was becoming feminized in a curious manner.

"Is it a play for the women?" he asked Severance in the early days of the development.

"No."

"You're certainly specializing on femaleness."

"For the men. Not the women. It's an old lure."

Banneker frowned. "And not a pretty one."

"Effective, though. I bagged it from the Police Gazette. Have you ever had occasion to note the almost unvarying cover appeal of that justly popular weekly?"

"Half-dressed women," said Banneker, whose early researches had extended even to those levels.

"Exactly. With all they connote. Thereby attracting the crude and roving male eye. Of course, we must do the trick more artistically and less obviously. But the pictured effect is the thing. I'm satisfied of that. By the way, I am having a little difficulty with your art department. Your man doesn't adapt himself to new ideas."

"I've thought him rather old-fashioned. What do you want to do?"

"Bring in a young chap named Capron whom I've run upon. He used to be an itinerant photographer, and afterward had a try at the movies, but he's essentially a news man. Let him read the papers for pictures."

Capron came on the staff as an insignificant member with an insignificant salary. Personally a man of blameless domesticity, he was intellectually and professionally a sex-monger. He conceived the business of a news art department to be to furnish pictured Susannahs for the delectation of the elders of the reading public. His *flair* for femininity he transferred to The Patriot's pages, according to a simple and direct formula; the greater the display of woman, the surer the appeal and therefore the sale. Legs and bosoms he specialized for in illustrations. Bathing-suits and boudoir scenes were his particular aim, although any picture with a scandal attachment in the accompanying news would serve, the latter, however, to be handled in such manner as invariably to point a moral. Herein his team work with Severance was applied in high perfection.

"Should Our Girls Become Artists' Models" was one of their early and inspired collaborations, a series begun with a line of "beauty pictures" and spun out by interviews with well or less known painters and illustrators, giving rich opportunity for displays of nudity, the moral being pointed by equally lavish interviews with sociologists and prominent Mothers in Israel. Although at least ninety-nine per cent of all professional posing is such as would not be out of place at a church sociable, the casual reader of the Capron-Severance presentation would have

supposed that a lace veil was the extent of the protection allowed to a female model between sheer nakedness and the outer artistic world. Following this came a department devoted (ostensibly) to physical culture for women. It was conducted by the proprietress of a fashionable reducing gymnasium, who was allowed, as this was a comparatively unimportant feature, to supply the text subject to Severance's touching-up ingenuity; but the models were devised and posed by Capron. They were extremely shapely and increasingly expressive in posture and arrangement until they attained a point where the post-office authorities evinced symptoms of rising excitement — though not the type of excitement at which the Art Expert was aiming — when the series took a turn for the milder, and more purely athletic, and, by the same token, less appetizing; and presently faded away in a burst of semi-editorial self-laudation over The Patriot's altruistic endeavors to improve the physical status of the "future mothers of the nation."

Failing any other excuse for their careful lubricities, the team could always conjure up an enticing special feature from an imaginary foreign correspondent, aimed direct at the family circle and warning against the "Moral Pitfalls of Paris," or the "Vampires of High Life in Vienna." The invariable rule was that all sex-stuff must have a moral and virtuous slant. Thus was afforded to the appreciative reader a double satisfaction, physical and ethical, pruriency and piety.

It was Capron who devised the simple but effective legend which afterward became, in a thousand variants, a stock part of every news item interesting enough to merit graphic treatment, "The X Marks the Spot Where the Body Was Found." He, too, adapted, from a design in a drug-store window picturing a sponge fisherman in action, the cross-section illustration for news. Within a few weeks he had displaced the outdated art editor and was in receipt of a larger salary than the city editor, who dealt primarily in news, not sensations, *panem* not *circenses*.

Sensationalism of other kinds was spurred to keep pace with the sex appeal. The news columns became constantly more lurid. They shrieked, yelled, blared, shrilled, and boomed the

scandals and horrors of the moment in multivocal, multigraphic clamor, tainting the peaceful air breathed by everyday people going about their everyday business, with incredible blatancies which would be forgotten on the morrow in the excitement of fresh percussions, though the cumulative effect upon the public mind and appetite might be ineradicable. "Murderer Dabbles Name in Bloody Print." "Wronged Wife Mars Rival's Beauty." "Society Woman Gives Hundred-Dollar-Plate Dinner." "Scientist Claims Life Flickers in Mummy." "Cocktails, Wine, Drug, Ruin for Lovely Girl of Sixteen." "Financier Resigns After Sprightly Scene at Long Beach." Severance developed a literary genius for excitant and provocative word-combinations in the headings; "Love-Slave," "Girl-Slasher," "Passion-Victim," "Death-Hand," "Vengeance-Oath," "Lust-Fiend." The articles chosen for special display were such as lent themselves, first, to his formula for illustration, and next to captions which thrilled with the sensations of crime, mystery, envy of the rich and conspicuous, or lechery, half concealed or unconcealed. For facts as such he cared nothing. His conception of news was as a peg upon which to hang a sensation. "Love and luxury for the women: money and power for the men," was his broad working scheme for the special interest of the paper, with, of course, crime and the allure of the flesh for general interest. A jungle man, perusing one day's issue (supposing him to have been competent to assimilate it), would have judged the civilization pictured therein too grisly for his unaccustomed nerves and fled in horror back to the direct, natural, and uncomplicated raids and homicides of the decent wilds.

The Great Gaines, descending for once from the habitual classicism of his phraseology, described The Patriot of Severance's production in two terse and sufficient words.

"It itches."

That itch irked Banneker almost unendurably at times. He longed to be relieved of it; to scratch the irritant Severance clean off the skin of The Patriot. But Severance was too evidently valuable. Banneker did go so far as to protest.

"Aren't you rather overdoing this thing, Severance?"

"Which thing? We're overdoing everything; hence the growth of the paper."

Banneker fell back upon banality. "Well, we've got to draw the line somewhere."

Severance bestowed upon the other his well-bred and delicate smile. "Exactly my principle. I'm for drawing the line every issue and on every page, if there's room for it. '*Nulla dies sine linea.*' The line of appeal to the sensations, whether it's a pretty face or a caption that jumps out and grabs you by the eye. I want to make 'em gloat."

"I see. You were in earnest more or less when in our first talk, you defined your profession."

Severance waved a graceful hand. "Prostitution is the profession of all successful journalism which looks at itself honestly. Why not play the pander frankly? — among ourselves, of course. Perhaps I'm offending you, Mr. Banneker."

"You're interesting me. But, 'among ourselves' you say. You're not a newspaper man; you haven't the traditions."

"Therefore I haven't the blind spots. I'm not fooled by the sentimentalism of the profession or the sniveling claims of being an apostle of public enlightenment. If enlightenment pays, all very well. But it's circulation, not illumination, that's the prime desideratum. Frankly, I'd feed the public gut with all it can and will stand."

"Even to the extent of keeping the Tallman divorce scandal on the front page for a week consecutively. You won't pretend that, as news, it's worth it."

"Give me a definition of news," retorted the expert. "The Tallman story won't alter the history of the world. But it has its — well, its specialized value for our purposes."

"You mean," said Banneker, deliberately stimulating his own growing nausea, "that it makes the public's mind itch."

"It's a pretty filthy and scabby sort of animal, the public, Mr. Banneker. We're not trying to reform its morals in our news columns, I take it."

"No. No; we're not. Still —"

"That's the province of your editorials," went on the apostle

of titillation smoothly. "You may in time even educate them up to a standard of decency where they won't demand the sort of thing we're giving them now. But our present business with the news columns is to catch them for you to educate."

"Quite so! You lure them into the dive where I wait to preach them a sermon."

After that conversation Banneker definitely decided that Severance's activities must be curbed. But when he set about it, he suffered an unpleasant surprise. Marrineal, thoroughly apprised of the new man's activities (as he was, by some occult means of his own, of everything going on in the office), stood fast by the successful method, and let Banneker know, tactfully but unmistakably, that Severance, who had been transferred to the regular payroll at a highly satisfactory figure, was to have a free hand. So the ex-religious editor continued to stroll leisurely through his unauthoritative and influential routine, contributing his commentary upon the news as it flowed in. He would saunter over to the make-up man's clotted desk, run his eye over the dummy of the morrow's issue, and inquire;

"Wasn't there a shooting scrape over a woman in a big West-Side apartment?...Being kept by the chap that was shot, wasn't she?...Oh, a bank clerk?...Well, that's a pretty dull-looking seventh page. Why not lift this text of the new Suburban Railways Bill and spread the shooting across three columns? Get Sanderson to work out a diagram and do one of his filmy line drawings of the girl lying on the couch. And let's be sure to get the word 'Banker' into the top head."

Or he would deliver a practical lecture from a text picked out of what to a less keen-scented news-hound might have appeared an unpromising subject.

"Can't we round out that disappearance story a little; the suburban woman who hasn't been seen since she went to New York three days ago? Get Capron to fake up a picture of the home with the three children in it grouped around Bereaved Husband, and — here, how would something like this do for caption: '"Mamma, Mamma! Come Back!" Sob Tiny Tots.' The human touch. Nothing like a bit of slush to catch

the women. And we've been going a little shy on sentiment lately."

The "human touch," though it became an office joke, also took its place as an unwritten law. Severance's calm and impersonal cynicism was transmuted into a genuine enthusiasm among the copy-readers. Headlining took on a new interest, whetted by the establishment of a weekly prize for the most attractive caption. Maximum of sensationalism was the invariable test.

Despite his growing distaste for the Severance cult, Banneker was honest enough to admit that the original stimulus dated from the day when he himself had injected his personality and ideas into the various departments of the daily. He had established the new policy; Severance had done no more than inform it with the heated imaginings and provocative pictorial quality inherent in a mind intensely if scornfully apprehensive of the unsatiated potential depravities of public taste. It was Banneker's hand that had set the strings vibrating to a new tune; Severance had only raised the pitch, to the *n*th degree of sensationalism. And, in so far as the editorial page gave him a lead, the disciple was faithful to the principles and policies of his chief. The practice of the news columns was always informed by a patently defensible principle. It pæaned the virtues of the poor and lowly; it howled for the blood of the wicked and the oppressor; it was strident for morality, the sanctity of the home, chastity, thrift, sobriety, the People, religion, American supremacy. As a corollary of these pious standards it invariably took sides against wealth and power, sentimentalized every woman who found her way into the public prints, whether she had perpetrated a murder or endowed a hospital, simpered and slavered over any "heart-interest story" of childhood ("blue-eyed tot stuff" was the technical office term), and licked reprehensive but gustful lips over divorce, adultery, and the sexual complications. It peeped through keyholes of print at the sanctified doings of Society and snarled while it groveled. All the shibboleths of a journalism which respected neither itself, its purpose, nor its readers echoed from every page. And this was the reflex of the work and thought of Errol Banneker, who intimately respected

himself, and his profession as expressed in himself. There is much of the paradoxical in journalism — as, indeed, in the life which it distortedly mirrors.

Every other newspaper in town caught the contagion; became by insensible degrees more sensational and pornographic. The Patriot had started a rag-time pace (based on the same fundamental instinct which the rhythm of rag-time expresses, if the psychologists are correct) and the rest must, perforce, adopt it. Such as lagged in this Harlot's Progress suffered a loss of circulation, journalism's most condign penalty. For there are certain appetites which, once stimulated, must be appeased. Otherwise business wanes!

Out of conscious nothing, as represented by the now moribund News, there was provoked one evening a large, round, middle-aged, smiling, bespectacled apparition who named himself as Rudy Sheffer and invited himself to a job. Marrineal had sent him to Severance, and Severance, ever tactful, had brought him to Banneker. Russell Edmonds being called in, the three sat in judgment upon the Big Idea which Mr. Sheffer had brought with him and which was:

"Give 'em a laugh."

"The potentialities of humor as a circulation agency," opined Severance in his smoothest academic voice, "have never been properly exploited."

"A laugh on every page where there ain't a thrill," pursued Sheffer confidently.

"You find some of our pages dull?" asked Banneker, always interested in any new view.

"Well, your market page ain't no scream. You gotta admit it."

"People don't usually want to laugh when they're studying the stock market," growled Edmonds.

"Surprise 'em, then. Give 'em a jab in the ribs and see how they like it. Pictures. Real comics. Anywhere in the paper that there's room for 'em."

"There's always a cartoon on the editorial page," pointed out Banneker.

"Cartoon? What does that get you? A cartoon's an editorial, ain't it?"

Russell Edmonds shot a side glance at Banneker, meaning: "This is no fool. Watch him."

"Makes 'em think, don't it?" pursued the visitor. "If it tickles 'em, that's on the side. It gets after their minds, makes 'em work for what they get. That's an effort. See?"

"All right. What's your aim?"

"Not their brains. I leave that to Mr. Banneker's editorials. I'm after the laugh that starts down here." He laid hand upon his rotund waistcoat. "The belly-laugh."

"The anatomy of anti-melancholy," murmured Severance. "Valuable."

"You're right, it's valuable," declared its proponent. "It's money; that's what it is. Watch 'em at the movies. When their bellies begin to shake, the picture's got 'em."

"How would you produce this desirable effect?" asked Severance.

"No trouble to show goods. I'm dealing with gents, I know. This is all under your shirt for the present, if you don't take up the scheme."

From a portfolio which he had set in a corner he produced a sheaf of drawings. They depicted the adventures, mischievous, predatory, or criminal, of a pair of young hopefuls whose physiognomies and postures were genuinely ludicrous

"Did you draw these?" asked Banneker in surprise, for the draughtsmanship was expert.

"No. Hired a kid artist to do 'em. I furnished the idea."

"Oh, you furnished the idea, did you?" queried Edmonds. "And where did you get it?"

With an ineffably satisfied air, Mr. Sheffer tapped his bullet head.

"You must be older than you look, then. Those figures of the kids are redrawn from a last-century German humorous classic, 'Max und Moritz.' I used to be crazy over it when I was a youngster. My grandfather brought it to me from Europe, and made a translation for us youngsters."

"Sure! Those pictures'd make a reformer laugh. I picked up the book in German on an Ann Street sidewalk stand, caught the Big Idea right then and there; to Americanize the stuff and —"

"For 'Americanize,' read 'steal,'" commented Edmonds.

"There ain't nothin' crooked in this," protested the other with sincerity. "The stuff ain't copyrighted here. I looked that up particularly."

"Quite true, I believe," confirmed Severance. "It's an open field."

"I got ten series mapped out to start. Call 'em 'The Trouble-hunter Twins, Ruff and Reddy.' If they catch on, the artist and me can keep 'em goin' forever. And they'll catch."

"I believe they will," said Severance.

"Smeared across the top of a page it'll make a business man laugh as hard as a kid. I know business men. I was one, myself. Sold bar fixtures on the road for four years. And my best selling method was the laughs I got out of 'em. Used to take a bit of chalk and do sketches on the table-tops. So I know what makes 'em laugh. Belly-laughs. You make a business man laugh that way, and you get his business. It ain't circulation alone; it's advertising that the stuff will bring in. Eh?"

"What do you think, Mr. Banneker?" asked Severance.

"It's worth trying," decided Banneker after thought. "You don't think so, do you, Pop?"

"Oh, go ahead!" returned Edmonds, spewing forth a mouthful of smoke as if to expel a bad taste. "What's larceny among friends?"

"But we're not taking anything of value, since there's no copyright and any one can grab it," pointed out the smooth Severance.

Thus there entered into the high-tension atmosphere of the sensationalized Patriot the relaxing quality of humor. Under the ingenuous and acquisitive Sheffer, whose twins achieved immediate popularity, it developed along other lines. Sheffer — who knew what makes business men laugh — pinned his simple faith to three main subjects, convulsive of the diaphragmatic muscles, building up each series upon the inherent humor to be extracted from physical violence as represented in the perpetrations and

punishments of Ruff and Reddy, marital infidelity as mirrored in the stratagems and errancies of an amorous ape with an aged and jealous spouse, and the sure-fire familiarity of aged minstrel jokes (mother-in-law, country constable, young married cookery, and the like) refurbished in pictorial serials through the agency of two uproarious and imbecilic vulgarians, Bonehead and Buttinsky.

Children cried for them, and laughed to exhaustion over them. Not less did the mentally exhausted business man writhe abdominally over their appeal. Spread across the top of three pages they wrung the profitable belly-laugh from growing thousands of new readers. If Banneker sometimes had misgivings that the educational influence of The Patriot was not notably improved by all this instigation of crime and immorality made subject for mirth in the mind of developing youth, he stifled them in the thought of increased reading public for his own columns. Furthermore, it was not his newspaper, anyway.

But the editorial page was still peculiarly his own, and with that clarity of view which he never permitted personal considerations to prejudice, Banneker perceived that it was falling below pitch. Or, rather, that, while it remained static, the rest of the paper, under the stimulus of Severance, Capron, Sheffer, and, in the background but increasingly though subtly assertive, Marrineal, had raised its level of excitation. Change his editorials he would not. Nor was there need; the response to them was too widespread and fervent, their following too blindly fanatic, the opposition roused by them too furious to permit of any doubt as to their effectiveness. But that portion of the page not taken up by his writings and the cartoon (which was often based upon an idea supplied by him), was susceptible of alteration, of keying-up. Casting about him for the popular note, the circus appeal, he started a "signed-article" department of editorial contributions to which he invited any and all persons of prominence in whatever line. The lure of that universal egotism which loves to see itself in the public eye secured a surprising number of names. Propagandists were quick to appreciate the opportunity of The Patriot's wide circulation for furthering their designs, selfish or

altruistic. To such desirables as could not be caught by other lures, Banneker offered generous payment.

It was on this latter basis that he secured a prize, in the person of the Reverend George Bland, ex-revivalist, ex-author of pious stories for the young, skilled dealer in truisms, in wordy platitudes couched largely in plagiarized language from the poets and essayists, in all the pseudo-religious slickeries wherewith men's souls are so easily lulled into self-satisfaction. The Good, the True, the Beautiful; these were his texts, but the real god of his worship was Success. This, under the guise of Duty ("man's God-inspired ambition to be true to his best possibilities"), he preached day in and day out through his "Daily Help" in The Patriot: Be guided by me and you will be good: Be good and you will be prosperous: Be prosperous and you will be happy. On an adjoining page there were other and far more specific instructions as to how to be prosperous and happy, by backing Speedfoot at 10 to 1 in the first race, or Flashaway at 5 to 2 in the third. Sometimes the Reverend Bland inveighed convincingly against the evils of betting. Yet a cynic might guess that the tipsters' recipes for being prosperous and happy (and therefore, by a logical inversion, good) were perhaps as well based and practical as the reverend moralist's. His correspondence, surest indication of editorial following, grew to be almost as large as Banneker's. Severance nicknamed him "the Oracle of Boobs," and for short he became known as the "Booblewarbler," for there were times when he burst into verse, strongly reminiscent of the older hymnals. This he resented hotly and genuinely, for he was quite sincere; as sincere as Sheffer, in his belief in himself. But he despised Sheffer and feared Severance, not for what the latter represented, but for the cynical honesty of his attitude. In retort for Severance's stab, he dubbed the pair Mephistopheles and Falstaff, which was above his usual felicitousness of characterization. Sheffer (who read Shakespeare to improve his mind, and for ideas!) was rather flattered.

Even the platitudinous Bland had nis practical inspirations; if they had not been practical, they would not have been Bland's. One of these was an analysis of the national business character.

"We Americans," he wrote, "are natural merchandisers. We care less for the making of a thing than for the selling of it. Salesmanship is the great American game. It calls forth all our native genius; it is the expression of our originality, our inventiveness, our ingenuity, our idealism," and so on, for a full column slathered with deadly and self-betraying encomiums. For the Reverend Bland believed heartily that the market was the highest test of humankind. *He* would rather sell a thing than make it! In fact, anything made with any other purpose than to sell would probably not be successful, and would fail to make its author prosperous; therefore it must be wrong. Not the creator, but the salesman was the modern evangel.

"The Booblewarbler has given away the game," commented Severance with his slight, ironic smile, the day when this naïve effusion appeared. "He's right, of course. But he thinks he's praising when he's damning."

Banneker was disturbed. But the flood of letters which came in promptly reassured him. The Reverend editorializer was hailed broadcast as the Messiah of the holy creed of Salesmanship, of the high cult of getting rid of something for more than it is worth. He was organized into a lecture tour; his department in the paper waxed ever greater. Banneker, with his swift appreciation of a hit, followed the lead with editorials; hired authors to write short stories glorifying the ennobled figure of the Salesman, his smartness, his strategy, his ruthless trickery, his success. And the salesmanhood of the nation, in trains, in hotel lobbies, at the breakfast table with its Patriot propped up flanking the egg and coffee, rose up to call him blessed and to add to his income.

Personal experiences in achieving success were a logical sequence to this; success in any field, from running a city as set forth by His Honor the Mayor, to becoming a movie star, by all the movie stars or aspirants whom their press-agents could crowd into the paper. A distinguished novelist of notably high blood-pressure contributed a series of thoughtful essays on "How to be Irresistible in Love," and a sentimental pugilist indulged in reminiscences (per a hired pen from the cheap magazine field) upon "The Influence of my Mother on my Career." An imitator

of Banneker developed a daily half-column of self-improvement and inspiration upon moral topics, achieving his effects by capitalizing all the words which otherwise would have been too feeble or banal to attract notice, thereby giving an air of sublimated importance to the mildly incomprehensible. Nine tenths of The Patriot's editorial readers believed that they were following a great philosopher along the path of the eternal profundities. To give a touch of science, an amateur astronomer wrote stirring imaginative articles on interstellar space, and there were occasional "authoritative" pronouncements by men of importance in the political, financial, or intellectual worlds, lifted from public speeches or old publications. The page, if it did not actually itch, buzzed and clanged. But above the composite clamor rose ever the voice of Banneker, clear, serene, compelling.

And Banneker took his pay for it, deeming it well earned.

## Chapter V

Life was broadening out before Banneker into new and golden persuasions. He had become a person of consequence, a force to be reckoned with, in the great, unheeding city. By sheer resolute thinking and planning, expressed and fulfilled in unsparing labor, he had made opportunity lead to opportunity until his position was won. He was courted, sought after, accepted by representative people of every sort, their interest and liking answering to his broad but fine catholicity of taste in human relationships. If he had no intimates other than Russell Edmonds, it was because he felt no need of them.

He had found Io again.

Prophecies had all failed in the matter of his rise. He thought, with pardonable exultation, of how he had confuted them, one after another. Cressey had doubted that one could be at the same time a successful journalist and a gentleman; Horace Vanney had deemed individuality inconsistent with newspaper writing; Tommy Burt and other jejune pessimists of the craft had declared genuine honesty incompatible with the higher and more authoritative phases of the profession. Almost without set plan and by an inevitable progress, as it now seemed to him, he had risen to the most conspicuous, if not yet the most important, position on Park Row, and had suffered no conscious compromise of standards, whether of self-respect, self-assertion, or honor.

Had he ever allowed monetary considerations seriously to concern him, he might have been troubled by an untoward and not easily explicable phenomenon. His bank account consistently failed to increase in ratio to his earnings. In fact, what with tempting investments, the importunities of a highly luxurious taste in life hitherto unsuspected, and an occasional gambling flyer, his balance was precarious, so to speak. With the happy optimism of one to whom the rosy present casts an intensified glow upon the future, he confidently anticipated a greatly and steadily augmented income, since the circulation of The Patriot was now the terror of its rivals. That any radical alteration could

be made in his method of recompense did not occur to him. So completely had he identified himself with The Patriot that he subconsciously regarded himself as essential to its prosperity if not to its actual existence. Therein he was supported by all the expert opinion of Park Row. Already he had accepted one modification of his contract, and his takings for new circulation were now twenty-five cents per unit per year instead of fifty cents as formerly.

But Tertius Marrineal and his business manager, a shrewd and practical gentleman named Haring, had done a vast deal of expert figuring, as a result of which the owner strolled into his editor's office one noon with his casual air of having nothing else to do, and pleasantly inquired:

"Busy?"

"If I weren't, I wouldn't be worth much," returned Banneker, in a cheerful tone.

"Well, if you can spare me fifteen minutes —"

"Sit down." Banneker swiveled his chair to face the other.

"I needn't tell you that the paper is a success; a big success," began Marrineal.

"You needn't. But it's always pleasant to hear."

"Possibly too big a success. What would you say to letting circulation drop for a while?"

"What!" Banneker felt a momentary queer sensation near the pit of his stomach. If the circulation dropped, his income followed it. But could Marrineal be serious?"

"The fact is we've reached the point where more circulation is a luxury. We're printing an enormous paper, and wood-pulp prices are going up. If we could raise our advertising rates;— but Mr. Haring thinks that three raises a year is all the traffic will bear. The fact is, Mr. Banneker, that the paper isn't making money. We've run ahead of ourselves. You're swallowing all the profits."

Banneker's inner voice said warningly to Banneker, "So that's it." Banneker's outer voice said nothing.

"Then there's the matter of advertising. Your policy is not helping us much there."

"The advertising is increasing."

"Not in proportion to circulation. Nothing like."

"If the proper ratio isn't maintained, that is the concern of the advertising department, isn't it?"

"Very much the concern. Will you talk with Mr. Haring about it?"

"No."

Early in Banneker's editorship it had been agreed that he should keep free of any business or advertising complications. Experience and the warnings of Russell Edmonds had told him that the only course of editorial independence lay in totally ignoring the effect of what he might write upon the profits and prejudices of the advertisers, who were, of course, the principal support of the paper. Furthermore, Banneker heartily despised about half of the advertising which the paper carried; dubious financial proffers, flamboyant mercantile copy of diamond dealers, cheap tailors, installment furniture profiteers, the lure of loan sharks and race-track tipsters, and the specious and deadly fallacies of the medical quacks. Appealing as it did to an ignorant and "easy" class of the public ("Banneker's First-Readers," Russell Edmonds was wont to call them), The Patriot offered a profitable field for all the pitfall-setters of print. The less that Banneker knew about them the more comfortable would he be. So he turned his face away from those columns.

The negative which he returned to Marrineal's question was no more or less than that astute gentleman expected.

"We carried an editorial last week on cigarettes, 'There's a Yellow Stain on Your Boy's Fingers — Is There Another on his Character?'"

"Yes. It is still bringing in letters."

"It is. Letters of protest."

"From the tobacco people?"

"Exactly. Mr. Banneker, don't you regard tobacco as a legitimate article of use?"

"Oh, entirely. Couldn't do without it, myself."

"Why attack it, then, in your column?"

"Because my column," answered Banneker with perceptible

emphasis on the possessive, "doesn't believe that cigarettes are good for boys."

"Nobody does. But the effect of your editorial is to play into the hands of the anti-tobacco people. It's an indiscriminate onslaught on all tobacco. That's the effect of it."

"Possibly."

"And the result is that the tobacco people are threatening to cut us off from their new advertising appropriation."

"Out of my department," said Banneker calmly.

Marrineal was a patient man. He pursued. "You have offended the medical advertisers by your support of the so-called Honest Label Bill."

"It's a good bill."

"Nearly a quarter of our advertising revenue is from the patent-medicine people."

"Mostly swindlers."

"They pay your salary," Marrineal pointed out.

"Not mine," said Banneker vigorously. "The paper pays my salary."

"Without the support of the very advertisers that you are attacking, it couldn't continue to pay it. Yet you decline to admit any responsibility to them."

"Absolutely. To them or for them."

"I confess I can't see your basis," said the reasonable Marrineal. "Considering what you have received in income from the paper —"

"I have worked for it."

"Admitted. But that you should absorb practically all the profits — isn't that a little lopsided, Mr. Banneker?"

"What is your proposition, Mr. Marrineal?"

Marrineal put his long, delicate fingers together, tip to tip before his face, and appeared to be carefully reckoning them up. About the time when he might reasonably have been expected to have audited the total and found it to be the correct eight with two supplementary thumbs, he ejaculated:

"Coöperation."

"Between the editorial page and the advertising department?"

"Perhaps I should have said profit-sharing. I propose that in lieu of our present arrangement, based upon a percentage on a circulation which is actually becoming a liability instead of an asset, we should reckon your salary on a basis of the paper's net earnings." As Banneker, sitting with thoughtful eyes fixed upon him, made no comment, he added: "To show that I do not underestimate your value to the paper, I propose to pay you fifteen per cent of the net earnings for the next three years. By the way, it won't be necessary hereafter, for you to give any time to the news or Sunday features."

"No. You've got out of me about all you could on that side," observed Banneker.

"The policy is established and successful, thanks largely to you. I would be the last to deny it."

"What do you reckon as my probable income under the proposed arrangement?"

"Of course," answered the proprietor apologetically, "it would be somewhat reduced this year. If our advertising revenue increases, as it naturally should, your percentage might easily rise above your earnings under the old arrangement."

"I see," commented Banneker thoughtfully. "You propose to make it worth my while to walk warily. As the pussy foots it, so to speak."

"I ask you to recognize the fairness of the proposition that you conduct your column in the best interests of the concern — which, under the new arrangement, would also be your own best interests."

"Clear. Limpidly clear," murmured Banneker. "And if I decline the new basis, what is the alternative?"

"Cut down circulation, and with it, loss."

"And the other, the real alternative?" queried the imperturbable Banneker.

Marrineal smiled, with a touch of appeal in his expression.

"Frankness is best, isn't it?" propounded the editor. "I don't believe, Mr. Marrineal, that this paper can get along without me. It has become too completely identified with my editorial idea. On the other hand, I can get along without it."

"By accepting the offer of the Mid-West Evening Syndicate, beginning at forty thousand a year?"

"You're well posted," said Banneker, startled.

"Of necessity. What would you suppose?"

"Your information is fairly accurate."

"I'm prepared to make you a guarantee of forty thousand, as a minimum."

"I shall make nearer sixty than fifty this year."

"At the expense of a possible loss to the paper. Come, Mr. Banneker; the fairness of my offer is evident. A generous guarantee, and a brilliant chance of future profits."

"*And* a free hand with my editorials?"

"Surely that will arrange itself."

"Precisely what I fear." Banneker had been making some swift calculations on his desk-blotter. Now he took up a blue pencil and with a gesture, significant and not without dramatic effect, struck it down through the reckoning. "No, Mr. Marrineal. It isn't good enough. I hold to the old status. When our contract is out —"

"Just a moment, Mr. Banneker. Isn't there a French proverb, something about no man being as indispensable as he thinks?" Marrineal's voice was never more suave and friendly. "Before you make any final decision, look these over." He produced from his pocket half a dozen of what appeared to be Patriot editorial clippings.

The editor of The Patriot glanced rapidly through them. A puzzled frown appeared on his face.

"When did I write these?"

"You didn't."

"Who did?"

"I."

"They're dam' good."

"Aren't they!"

"Also, they're dam' thievery."

"Doubtless you mean flattery. In its sincerest form. Imitation."

"Perfect. I could believe I'd written them myself."

"Yes; I've been a very careful student of The Patriot's editorial style."

"The Patriot's! Mine!"

"Surely not. You would hardly contend seriously that, having paid the longest price on record for the editorials, The Patriot has not a vested right in them and their style."

"I see," said Banneker thoughtfully. Inwardly he cursed himself for the worst kind of a fool; the fool who underestimates the caliber of his opponent.

"Would you say," continued the smooth voice of the other, "that these might be mistaken for your work?"

"Nobody would know the difference. It's robbery of the rankest kind. But it's infernally clever."

"I'm not going to quarrel with you over a definition, Mr. Banneker," said Marrineal. He leaned a little forward with a smile so frank and friendly that it quite astonished the other. "And I'm not going to let you go, either," he pursued. "You need me and I need you. I'm not fool enough to suppose that the imitation can ever continue to be as good as the real thing. We'll make it a fifty thousand guarantee, if you say so. And, as for your editorial policy — well, I'll take a chance on your seeing reason. After all, there's plenty of earth to prance on without always treading on people's toes. . . . Well, don't decide now. Take your time to it." He rose and went to the door. There he turned, flapping the loose imitations in his hands.

"Banneker," he said chuckling, "aren't they really dam' good!" and vanished.

In that moment Banneker felt a surge of the first real liking he had ever known for his employer. Marrineal had been purely human for a flash.

Nevertheless, in the first revulsion after the proprietor had left, Banneker's unconquered independence rose within him, jealous and clamant. He felt repressions, claims, interferences potentially closing in upon his pen, also an undefined dread of the sharply revealed overseer. That a force other than his own mind and convictions should exert pressure, even if unsuccessful, upon his writings, was intolerable. Better anything than that. The

Mid-West Syndicate, he knew, would leave him absolutely untrammeled. He would write the general director at once.

In the act of beginning the letter, the thought struck and stunned him that this would mean leaving New York. Going to live in a Middle-Western city, a thousand miles outside of the orbit in which moved Io Eyre!

He left the letter unfinished, and the issue to the fates.

## Chapter VI

Put to the direct question, as, for example, on the witness stand, Mr. Ely Ives would, before his connection with Tertius Marrineal, have probably identified himself as a press-agent. In that capacity he had acted, from time to time, for a railroad with many axes to grind, a widespread stock-gambling enterprise, a minor political ring, a liquor combination, and a millionaire widow from the West who innocently believed that publicity, as manipulated by Mr. Ives, could gain social prestige for her in the East.

In every phase of his employment, the ex-medical student had gathered curious and valuable lore. In fact he was one of those acquisitive persons who collect and hoard scandals, a miser of private and furtive information. His was the zeal of the born collector; something of the genius, too: he boasted a keen instinct. In his earlier and more precarious days he had formed the habit of watching for and collating all possible advices concerning those whom he worked for or worked against and branching from them to others along radiating lines of business, social, or family relationships. To him New York was a huge web, of sinister and promising design, dim, involved, too often impenetrable in the corners where the big spiders spin. He had two guiding maxims: "It may come in handy some day," and "They'll all bear watching." Before the prosperous time, he had been, in his devotion to his guiding principles, a practitioner of the detective arts in some of their least savory phases; had haunted doorsteps, lurked upon corners, been rained upon, snowed upon, possibly spat upon, even arrested; all of which he accepted, mournful but uncomplaining. One cannot whole-heartedly serve an ideal and come off scatheless. He was adroit, well-spoken, smooth of surface, easy of purse, untiring, supple, and of an inexhaustible good-humor. It was from the ex-medical student that Marrineal had learned of Banneker's offer from the Syndicate; also of his over-prodigal hand in money matters.

"He's got to have the cash," was the expert's opinion upon Banneker. "There's your hold on him. . . . Quit? No danger. New York's in his blood. He's in love with life, puppy-love; his clubs, his theater first-nights, his invitations to big houses which he seldom accepts, big people coming to his House with Three Eyes. And, of course, his sense of power in the paper. No; he won't quit. How could he? He'll compromise."

"Do you figure him to be the compromising sort?" asked Marrineal doubtfully.

"He isn't the journalistic Puritan that he lets on to be. Look at that Harvey Wheelwright editorial," pointed out the acute Ives. "He don't believe what he wrote about Wheelwright; just did it for his own purposes. Well, if the oracle can work himself for his own purposes, others can work him when the time comes, if it's properly managed."

Marrineal shook his head. "If there's a weakness in him I haven't found it."

Ives put on a look of confidential assurance. "Be sure it's there. Only it isn't of the ordinary kind. Banneker is pretty big in his way. No," he pursued thoughtfully; "it isn't women, and it isn't Wall Street, and it isn't drink; it isn't even money, in the usual sense. But it's something. By the way, did I tell you that I'd found an acquaintance from the desert where Banneker hails from?"

"No." Marrineal's tone subtly indicated that he should have been told at once. That sort of thing was, indeed, the basis on which Ives drew a considerable stipend from his patron's private purse, as "personal representative of Mr. Marrineal" for purposes unspecified.

"A railroad man. From what he tells me there was some sort of love-affair there. A girl who materialized from nowhere and spent two weeks, mostly with the romantic station-agent. Might have been a princess in exile, by my informant, who saw her twice. More likely some cheap little skate of a movie actress on a bust."

"A station-agent's taste in women friends —" began Marrineal, and forbore unnecessarily to finish.

"Possibly it has improved. Or — well, at any rate, there was

something there. My railroad man thinks the affair drove Banneker out of his job. The fact of his being woman-proof here points to its having been serious."

"There was a girl out there about that time visiting Camilla Van Arsdale," remarked Marrineal carelessly; "a New York girl. One of the same general set. Miss Van Arsdale used to be a New Yorker and rather a distinguished one."

Too much master of his devious craft to betray discomfiture over another's superior knowledge of a subject which he had tried to make his own, Ely Ives remarked:

"Then she was probably the real thing. The princess on vacation. You don't know who she was, I suppose," he added tentatively.

Marrineal did not answer, thereby giving his factotum uncomfortably to reflect that he really must not expect payment for information and the information also.

"I guess he'll bear watching." Ives wound up with his favorite philosophy.

It was a few days after this that, by a special interposition of kindly chance, Ives, having returned from a trip out of town, saw Banneker and Io breakfasting in the station restaurant. To Marrineal he said nothing of this at the time; nor, indeed, to any one else. But later he took it to a very private market of his own, the breakfast-room of a sunny and secluded house far uptown, where lived, in an aroma of the domestic virtues, a benevolent-looking old gentleman who combined the attributes of the ferret, the leech, and the vulture in his capacity as editor of that famous weekly publication, The Searchlight. Ives did not sell in that mart; he traded for other information. This time he wanted something about Judge Willis Enderby, for he was far enough on the inside politically to see in him a looming figure which might stand in the way of certain projects, unannounced as yet, but tenderly nurtured in the ambitious breast of Tertius C. Marrineal. From the gently smiling patriarch he received as much of the unwritten records as that authority deemed it expedient to give him, together with an admonition, thrown in for good measure.

"Dangerous, my young friend! Dangerous!"

The passionate and patient collector thought it highly probable that Willis Enderby would be dangerous game. Certainly he did not intend to hunt in those fields, unless he could contrive a weapon of overwhelming caliber.

Ely Ives's analysis of Banneker's situation was in a measure responsible for Marrineal's proposition of the new deal to his editor.

"He has accepted it," the owner told his purveyor of information. "But the real fight is to come."

"Over the policy of the editorial page," opined Ives.

"Yes. This is only a truce."

As a truce Banneker also regarded it. He had no desire to break it. Nor, after it was established, did Marrineal make any overt attempt to interfere with his conduct of his column.

After awaiting gage of battle from his employer, in vain, Banneker decided to leave the issue to chance. Surely he was not surrendering any principle, since he continued to write as he chose upon whatever topics he selected. Time enough to fight when there should be urged upon him either one of the cardinal sins of journalism, the *suppressio veri* or the *suggestio falsi*, which he had more than once excoriated in other papers, to the pious horror of the hush-birds of the craft who had chattered and cheeped accusations of "fouling one's own nest."

Opportunity was not lacking to Marrineal for objections to a policy which made powerful enemies for the paper; Banneker, once assured of his following, had hit out right and left. From being a weak-kneed and rather apologetic defender of the "common people," The Patriot had become, logically, under Banneker's vigorous and outspoken policy, a proponent of the side of labor against capital. It had hotly supported two important and righteous local strikes and been the chief agent in winning one. With equal fervor it had advocated a third strike whose justice was at best dubious and had made itself anathema, though the strike was lost, to an industrial group which was honestly striving to live up to honorable standards. It had offended a powerful ring of bankers and for a time embarrassed Marrineal in his

loans. It had threatened editorial reprisals upon a combination of those feared and arrogant advertisers, the department stores, for endeavoring, with signal lack of success, to procure the suppression of certain market news. It became known as independent, honest, unafraid, radical (in Wall Street circles "socialistic" or even "anarchistic"), and, to the profession, as dangerous to provoke. Advertisers were, from time to time, alienated; public men, often of The Patriot's own trend of thought, opposed. Commercial associations even passed resolutions, until Banneker took to publishing them with such comment as seemed to him good and appropriate. Marrineal uttered no protest, though the unlucky Haring beat his elegantly waistcoated breast and uttered profane if subdued threats of resigning, which were for effect only; for The Patriot's circulation continued to grow and the fact to which every advertising expert clings as to the one solid hope in a vaporous calling, is that advertising follows circulation.

Seldom did Banneker see his employer in the office, but Marrineal often came to the Saturday nights of The House With Three Eyes, which had already attained the fame of a local institution. As the numbers drawn to it increased, it closed its welcoming orbs earlier and earlier, and, once they were darkened, there was admittance only for the chosen few.

It was a first Saturday in October, New York's homing month for its indigenous social birds and butterflies, when The House triply blinked itself into darkness at the untimely hour of eleven-forty-five. There was the usual heterogeneous crowd there, alike in one particular alone, that every guest represented, if not necessarily distinction, at least achievement in his own line. Judge Willis Enderby, many times invited, had for the first time come. At five minutes after midnight, the incorruptible doorkeeper sent an urgent message requesting Mr. Banneker's personal attention to a party who declined politely but firmly to be turned away. The host, answering the summons, found Io. She held out both hands to him.

"Say you're glad to see me," she said imperatively.

"Light up the three eyes," Banneker ordered the doorman. "Are you answered?" he said to Io.

"Ah, that's very pretty," she approved. "It means 'welcome,' doesn't it?"

'Welcome," he assented.

"Then Herbert and Esther can come in, can't they? They're waiting in the car for me to be rejected in disgrace. They've even bet on it."

"They lose," answered Banneker with finality.

"And you forgive me for cajoling your big, black Cerberus, because it's my first visit this year, and if I'm not nicely treated I'll never come again."

"Your welcome includes full amnesty."

"Then if you'll let me have one of my hands back — it doesn't matter which one, really — I'll signal the others to come in."

Which, accordingly, she did. Banneker greeted Esther Forbes and Cressey, and waited for the trio until they came down. There was a stir as they entered. There was usually a stir in any room which Io entered. She had that quality of sending waves across the most placid of social pools. Willis Enderby was one of the first to greet her, a quick irradiation of pleasure relieving the austere beauty of his face.

"I thought the castle was closed," he wondered. "How did you cross the inviolable barriers?"

"I had the magic password," smiled Io.

"Youth? Beauty? Or just audacity?"

"Your Honor is pleased to flatter," she returned, drooping her eyes at him with a purposefully artificial effect. From the time when she was a child of four she had carried on a violent and highly appreciated flirtation with "Cousin Billy," being the only person in the world who employed the diminutive of his name.

"You knew Banneker before? But, of course. Everybody knows Banneker."

"It's quite wonderful, isn't it! He never makes an effort, I'm told. People just come to him. Where did you meet him?"

Enderby told her. "We're allies, in a way. Though sometimes he is against us. He's doing yeoman work in this reform mayoralty campaign. If we elect Robert Laird, as I think we shall, it will be chiefly due to The Patriot's editorials."

"Then you have confidence in Mr. Banneker?" she asked quickly.

"Well — in a way, I have," he returned hesitantly.

"But with reservations," she interpreted. "What are they?"

"One, only, but a big one. The Patriot itself. You see, Io, The Patriot is another matter."

"Why is it another matter?"

"Well, there's Marrineal, for example."

"I don't know Mr. Marrineal. Evidently you don't trust him."

"I trust nobody," disclosed the lawyer, a little sternly, "who is represented by what The Patriot is and does, whether it be Marrineal, Banneker, or another." His glance, wandering about the room, fell on Russell Edmonds, seated in a corner talking with the Great Gaines. "Unless it be Edmonds over there," he qualified. "All his life he has fought me as a corporation lawyer; yet I have the queer feeling that I could trust the inmost secret of my life to his honor. Probably I'm an old fool, eh?"

Io devoted a moment's study to the lined and worn face of the veteran. "No. I think you're right," she pronounced.

"In any case, he isn't responsible for The Patriot. He can't help it."

"Don't be so cryptic, Cousin Billy. Can't help what? What is wrong with the paper?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"But I want to understand," said imperious Io.

"As a basis to understanding, you'd have to read the paper."

"I have. Every day. All of it."

He gave her a quick, reckoning look which she sustained with a slight deepening of color. "The advertisements, too?" She nodded. "What do you think of them?"

"Some of them are too disgusting to discuss."

"Did it occur to you to compare them with the lofty standards of our young friend's editorials?"

"What has he to do with the advertisements?" she countered.

"Assume, for the sake of the argument, that he has nothing to do with them. You may have noticed a recent editorial against

race-track gambling, with the suicide of a young bank messenger who had robbed his employer to pay his losses as text."

"Well? Surely that kind of editorial makes for good."

"Being counsel for that bank, I happen to know the circumstances of the suicide. The boy had pinned his faith to one of the race-track tipsters who advertise in The Patriot to furnish a list of sure winners for so much a week."

"Do you suppose that Mr. Banneker knew that?"

"Probably not. But he knows that his paper takes money for publishing those vicious advertisements."

"Suppose he couldn't help it?"

"Probably he can't."

"Well, what would you have him do? Stop writing the editorials? I think it is evidence of his courage that he should dare to attack the evils which his own paper fosters."

"That's one view of it, certainly," replied Enderby dryly. "A convenient view. But there are other details. Banneker is an ardent advocate of abstinence, 'Down with the Demon Rum!' The columns of The Patriot reek with whiskey ads. The same with tobacco."

"But, Cousin Billy, you don't believe that a newspaper should shut out liquor and tobacco advertisements, do you?"

The lawyer smiled patiently. "Come back on the track, Io," he invited. "That isn't the point. If a newspaper preaches the harm in these habits, it shouldn't accept money for exploiting them. Look further. What of the loan-shark offers, and the blue-sky stock propositions, and the damnable promises of the consumption and cancer quacks? You can't turn a page of The Patriot without stumbling on them. There's a smell of death about that money."

"Don't all the newspapers publish the same kind of advertisements?" argued the girl.

"Certainly not. Some won't publish an advertisement without being satisfied of its good faith. Others discriminate less carefully. But there are few as bad as The Patriot."

"If Mr. Banneker were your client, would you advise him to resign?" she asked shrewdly.

Enderby winced and chuckled simultaneously. "Probably not. It is doubtful whether he could find another rostrum of equal influence. And his influence is mainly for good. But since you seem to be interested in newspapers, Io" — he gave her another of his keen glances — "from The Patriot you can make a diagnosis of the disease from which modern journalism is suffering. A deep-seated, pervasive insincerity. At its worst, it is open, shameless hypocrisy. The public feels it, but is too lacking in analytical sense to comprehend it. Hence the unformulated, instinctive, universal distrust of the press. 'I never believe anything I read in the papers.' Of course, that is both false and silly. But the feeling is there; and it has to be reckoned with one day. From this arises an injustice, that the few papers which are really upright, honest, and faithful to their own standards, are tainted in the public mind with the double-dealing of the others. Such as The Patriot."

"You use The Patriot for your purposes," Io pointed out.

"When it stands for what I believe right. I only wish I could trust it."

"Then you *really* feel that you can't trust Mr. Banneker?"

"Ah; we're back to that!" thought Enderby with uneasiness. Aloud he said: "It's a very pretty problem whether a writer who shares the profits of a hypocritical and dishonest policy can maintain his own professional independence and virtue. I gravely doubt it."

"I don't," said Io, and there was pride in her avowal.

"My dear," said the Judge gravely, "what does it all mean? Are you letting yourself become interested in Errol Banneker?"

Io raised clear and steady eyes to the concerned regard of her old friend. "If I ever marry again, I shall marry him."

"You're not going to divorce poor Delavan?" asked the other quickly.

"No. I shall play the game through," was the quiet reply.

For a space Willis Enderby sat thinking. "Does Banneker know your — your intentions?"

"No."

"You mustn't let him, Io."

"He won't know the intention. He may know the — the feeling back of it." A slow and glorious flush rose in her face, making her eyes starry. "I don't know that I can keep it from him, Cousin Billy. I don't even know that I want to. I'm an honest sort of idiot, you know."

"God grant that he may prove as honest!" he half whispered.

Presently Banneker, bearing a glass of champagne and some pâté sandwiches for Io, supplanted the lawyer.

"Are you the devotee of toil that common report believes, Ban?" she asked him lazily. "They say that you write editorials with one hand and welcome your guests with the other."

"Not quite that," he answered. "To-night I'm not thinking of work. I'm not thinking of anything but you. It's very wonderful, your being here."

"But I want you to think of work. I want to see you in the very act. Won't you write an editorial for me?"

He shook his head. "This late? That would be cruelty to my secretary."

"I'll take it down for you. I'm fairly fast on the typewriter."

"Will you give me the subject, too?"

"No more than fair," she admitted. "What shall it be? It ought to be something with memories in it. . . . Books? Poetry?" she groped. "I've got it! Your oldest, favorite book. Have you forgotten?"

"The Sears-Roebuck catalogue? I get a copy every season, to renew the old thrill."

"What a romanticist you are!" said she softly. "Couldn't you write an editorial about it?"

"Couldn't I? Try me. Come up to the den."

He led the way to the remote austerities of the work-room. From a shelf he took down the fat, ornate pamphlet, now much increased in bulk over its prototype of the earlier years. With random finger he parted the leaves, here, there, again and still again, seeking auguries.

"Ready?" he said. "Now, I shut my eyes — and we're in the shack again — the clean air of desert spaces — the click of the transmitter in the office that I won't answer, being more

importantly engaged — the faint fragrance of *you* permeating everything — youth — the unknown splendor of life — Now! Go!"...

Of that editorial, composed upon the unpromising theme of mail-order merchandising, the Great Gaines afterward said that it was a kaleidoscopic panorama set moving to the harmonic undertones of a song of winds and waters, of passion and the inner meanings of life, as if Shelley had rhapsodized a catalogue into poetic being and glorious significance. He said it was foolish to edit a magazine when one couldn't trust a cheap newspaper not to come flaming forth into literature which turned one's most conscientious and aspiring efforts into tinsel. He also said "Damn!"

Io Welland (for it was Io Welland and not Io Eyre whom the soothsayer saw before him as he declaimed), instrument and inspiration of the achievement, said no word of direct praise. But as she wrote, her fingers felt as if they were dripping electric sparks. When, at the close, he asked, quite humbly, "Is that what you wanted?" she caught her breath on something like a sob.

"I'll give you a title," she said, recovering herself. "Call it 'If there were Dreams to Sell.'"

"Ah, that's good!" he cried. "My readers won't get it. Pinheads! They get nothing that isn't plain as the nose on their silly faces. Never mind. It's good for 'em to be puzzled once in a while. Teaches 'em their place. . . . I'll tell you who will understand it, though," he continued, and laughed queerly.

"All the people who really matter will."

"Some who matter a lot to The Patriot will. The local merchants who advertise with us. They'll be wild."

"Why?"

"They hate the mail-order houses with a deadly fear, because the cataloguers undersell them in a lot of lines. Won't Rome howl the day after this appears!"

"Tell me about the relation between advertising and policy, Ban," invited Io, and summarized Willis Enderby's views.

Banneker had formulated for his own use and comfort the

fallacy which has since become standard for all journalists unwilling or unable to face the issue of their own responsibility to the public. He now gave it forth confidently.

"A newspaper, Io, is like a billboard. Any one has a right to hire it for purposes of exploiting and selling whatever he has to sell. In accepting the advertisement, provided it is legal and decent, the publisher accepts no more responsibility than the owner of the land on which a billboard stands. Advertising space is a free forum."

"But when it affects the editorial attitude —"

"That's the test," he put in quickly. "That's why I'm glad to print this editorial of ours. It's a declaration of independence."

"Yes," she acquiesced eagerly.

"If ever I use the power of my editorials for any cause that I don't believe in — yes, or for my own advantage or the advantage of my employer — that will be the beginning of surrender. But as long as I keep a free pen and speak as I believe for what I hold as right and against what I hold as wrong, I can afford to leave the advertising policy to those who control it. It isn't my responsibility. . . . It's an omen, Io; I was waiting for it. Marrineal and I are at a deadlock on the question of my control of the editorial page. This ought to furnish a fighting issue. I'm glad it came from you."

"Oh, but if it's going to make trouble for you, I shall be sorry. And I was going to propose that we write one every Saturday."

"Io!" he cried. "Does that mean —"

"It means that I shall become a regular attendant at Mr. Errol Banneker's famous Saturday nights. Don't ask me what more it means." She rose and delivered the typed sheets into his hands. "I — I don't know, myself. Take me back to the others, Ban."

To Banneker, wakened next morning to a life of new vigor and sweetness, the outcome of the mail-order editorial was worth not one troubled thought. All his mind was centered on Io.

## Chapter VII

Explosions of a powerful and resonant nature followed the publication of the fantastic, imaginative, and delightful mail-order catalogue editorial. In none of these senses, except the first, did it appeal to the advertising managers of the various department stores. They looked upon it as an outrage, an affront, a deliberate slap in the face for an established, vested, and prodigal support of the newspaper press. What the devil did The Patriot mean by it; The Patriot which sorely needed just their class of reputable patronage, and, after sundry contortions of rate-cutting, truckling, and offers of news items to back the advertising, was beginning to get it? They asked themselves, and, failing of any satisfactory answer, they asked The Patriot in no uncertain terms. Receiving vague and pained replies, they even went to the length of holding a meeting and sending a committee to wait upon the desperate Haring, passing over the advertising manager who was a mere figurehead in The Patriot office.

Then began one of those scenes of bullying and browbeating to which every newspaper, not at once powerful and honest enough to command the fear and respect of its advertisers, is at some time subjected. Haring, the victim personifying the offending organ, was stretched upon the rack and put to the question. What explanation had he to offer of The Patriot's breach of faith?

He had none, had the miserable business manager. No one could regret it more than he. But, really, gentlemen, to call it a breach of faith —

What else was it? Wasn't the paper turning on its own advertisers?

Well; in a sense. But not —

But nothing! Wasn't it trying to undermine their legitimate business?

Not intentionally, Mr. Haring was (piteously) sure.

Intentionally be damned! Did he expect to carry their adver-

tising on one page and ruin their business on another? Did he think they were putting money into The Patriot — a doubtful medium for their business, at best — to cut their own throats? They'd put it to him reasonably, now; who, after all, paid for the getting out of The Patriot? Wasn't it the advertisers?

Certainly, certainly, gentlemen. Granted.

Could the paper run a month, a fortnight, a week without advertising?

No; no! It couldn't. No newspaper could.

Then if the advertisers paid the paper's way, weren't they entitled to some say about it? Didn't it have a right to give 'em at least a fair show?

Indeed, gentlemen, if he, Haring, were in control of the paper —

Then, why; why the *hell* was a cub of an editor allowed to cut loose and jump their game that way? They could find other places to spend their money; yes, and get a better return for it. They'd see The Patriot, and so on, and so forth.

Mr. Haring understood their feelings, sympathized, even shared them. Unfortunately the editorial page was quite out of his province.

Whose province was it, then? Mr. Banneker's, eh? And to whom was Mr. Banneker responsible? Mr. Marrineal, alone? All right! They would see Mr. Marrineal.

Mr. Haring was sorry, but Mr. Marrineal was out of town. (Fiction.)

Well, in that case, Banneker. They'd trust themselves to show him which foot he got off on. They'd teach (two of them, in their stress of emotion, said "learn"; they were performing this in chorus) Banneker —

Oh, Mr. Banneker wasn't there, either. (Haring, very terrified, and having built up an early conception of the Wild West Banneker from the clean-up of the dock gang, beheld in his imagination disjected members of the committee issuing piecemeal from the doors and windows of the editorial office, the process being followed by an even more regrettable exodus of advertising from the pages of The Patriot.)

Striving to be at once explanatory and propitiatory to all and sundry, Haring was reduced to inarticulate, choking interjections and paralytic motions of the hands, when a member of the delegation, hitherto silent, spoke up.

He was the representative of McLean & Swazey, a college graduate of a type then new, though now much commoner, in the developing profession of advertising. He had read the peccant editorial with a genuine relish of its charm and skill, and had justly estimated it for what it was, an intellectual *jeu d'esprit*, the expression of a passing fancy for a tempting subject, not of a policy to be further pursued.

"Enough has been said, I think, to define our position," said he. "All that we need is some assurance that Mr. Banneker's wit and skill will not be turned again to the profit of our competitors who, by the way, do *not* advertise in The Patriot."

Haring eagerly gave the assurance. He would have given assurance of Banneker's head on a salver to be rid of these persecuting autocrats. They withdrew, leaving behind an atmosphere of threat and disaster, dark, inglorious clouds of which Haring trailed behind him when he entered the office of the owner with his countenance of woe. His postulate was that Mr. Marrineal should go to his marplot editor and duly to him lay down the law; no more offending of the valuable department-store advertisers. No; nor of any others. Or he, Haring (greatly daring), would do it himself.

Beside the sweating and agonizing business manager, Marrineal looked very cool and tolerant and mildly amused.

"If you did that, Mr. Haring, do you appreciate what the result would be? We should have another editorial worse than the first, as soon as Mr. Banneker could think it out. No; you leave this to me. I'll manage it."

His management took the negative form of a profound silence upon the explicit point. But on the following morning Banneker found upon his desk a complete analytical table showing the advertising revenue of the paper by classes, with a star over the department-store list, indicating a dated withdrawal of twenty-two thousand dollars a year. The date was of that day. Thus

was Banneker enabled to figure out, by a simple process, the loss to himself of any class of advertising, or even small group in a class, dropping out of the paper. It was clever of Marrineal, he admitted to himself, and, in a way, disappointing. His proffered gage of battle had been refused, almost ignored. The issue was not to be joined when he was ready, but when Marrineal was ready, and on Marrineal's own ground. Very well, Banneker could be a good waiter. Meantime he had at least asserted his independence.

Io called him up by 'phone, avid of news of the editorial, and he was permitted to take her to luncheon and tell her all about it. In her opinion he had won a victory; established a position. Banneker was far less sanguine; he had come to entertain a considerable respect for Marrineal's capacity. And he had another and more immediate complication on his mind, which fact his companion, by some occult exercise of divination, perceived.

"What else is worrying you, Ban?" she asked.

Banneker did not want to talk about that. He wanted to talk about Io, about themselves. He said so. She shook her head.

"Tell me about the paper.'

"Oh, just the usual complications. There's nothing to interest you in them."

"Everything," she maintained ardently.

Banneker caught his breath. Had she given him her lips, it could hardly have meant more — perhaps not meant so much as this tranquil assumption of her right to share in the major concerns of his life.

"If you've been reading the paper," he began, and waited for her silent nod before going on, "you know our attitude toward organized labor."

"Yes. You are for it when it is right and not always against it when it is wrong."

"One can't split hairs in a matter of editorial policy. I've made The Patriot practically the mouthpiece of labor in this city; much more so than the official organ, which has no influence and a small following. Just now I'm specially anxious to hold them in line for the mayoralty campaign. We've got to elect

Robert Laird. Otherwise we'll have such an orgy of graft and rottenness as the city has never seen."

"Isn't the labor element for Laird?"

"It isn't against him, except that he is naturally regarded as a silk-stocking. The difficulty isn't politics. There's some new influence in local labor circles that is working against me; against The Patriot. I think it's a fellow named McClintick, a new man from the West."

"Perhaps he wants to be bought off."

"You're thinking of the old style of labor leader," returned Banneker. "It isn't as simple as that. No; from what I hear, he's a fanatic. And he has great influence."

"Get hold of him and talk it out with him," advised Io.

"I intend to." He brooded for a moment. "There isn't a man in New York," he said fretfully, "that has stood for the interests of the masses and against the power of money as I have. Why, Io, before we cut loose in The Patriot, a banker or a railroad president was sacrosanct. His words were received with awe. Wall Street was the holy of holies, not to be profaned by the slightest hint of impiety. Well, we've changed all that! Not I, alone. Our cartoons have done more than the editorials. Every other paper in town has had to follow our lead. Even The Ledger."

"I like The Ledger," declared Io.

"Why?"

"I don't know. It has a sort of dignity; the dignity of self-respect."

"Hasn't The Patriot?" demanded the jealous Banneker.

"Not a bit," she answered frankly, "except for your editorials. They have the dignity of good workmanship, and honesty, and courage, even when you're wrong."

"Are we so often wrong, Io?" he said wistfully.

"Dear boy, you can't expect a girl, brought up as I have been, to believe that society is upside down, and would be better if it were tipped over the other way and run by a lot of hod-carriers and ditch-diggers and cooks. Can you, now?"

"Of course not. Nor is that what I advocate. I'm for the

under dog. For fair play. So are you, aren't you? I saw your name on the Committee List of the Consumers' League, dealing with conditions in the department stores."

"That's different," she said. "Those girls haven't a chance in some of the shops. They're brutalized. The stores don't even pretend to obey the laws. We are trying to work out some sort of organization, now, for them."

"Yet you're hostile to organized labor! Who shall ever understand the feminine mind! Some day you'll be coming to us for help."

"Very likely. It must be a curious sensation, Ban, to have the consciousness of the power that you wield, and to be responsible to nobody on earth."

"To the public that reads us," he corrected.

"Not a real responsibility. There is no authority over you; no appeal from your judgments. Hasn't that something to do with people's dislike and distrust of the newspapers; the sense that so much irresponsible power is wrong?"

"Yet," he said, "any kind of censorship is worse than the evil it remedies. I've never shown you my creed, have I?"

His manner was half jocular; there was a smile on his lips, but his eyes seemed to look beyond the petty troubles and problems of his craft to a final and firm verity.

"Tell me," she bade him.

He drew his watch out and opened the back. For a moment she thought, with confused emotions, that she would see there a picture of herself of which he might have possessed himself somewhere. She closed her eyes momentarily against the fear of that anti-climax. When she opened them, it was to read, in a clear, fine print those high and sure words of Milton's noblest message:

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing.

Twice she read the pregnant message.

"I have it," said she gravely. "To keep — for always."

"Some day I'll put it at the head of The Patriot."

"Why not now?"

"Not ready. I want to be surer; absolutely sure."

"I'm sure," she declared superbly; "of you."

"You make me sure of myself, Io. But there's Marrineal."

"Yes; there's Marrineal. You must have a paper of your own, mustn't you, Ban, eventually?"

"Perhaps. If I ever get enough money to own it absolutely."

"Only four years ago," she murmured, with apparent irrelevancy. "And now —"

"When shall I see you again?" he asked anxiously as she rose. "Are you coming Saturday night?"

"Of course," said Io.

Through the agency of Russell Edmonds, McClintick, the labor leader, came to see Banneker. He was a stooping giant with a deep, melancholy voice, and his attitude toward The Patriot was one of distrustful reticence. Genuine ardor has, however, a warming influence. McClintick's silence melted by degrees, not into confidence but, surprisingly, into indignation, directed upon all the "capitalistic press" in general, but in particular against The Patriot. Why single out The Patriot, specially, Banneker asked.

"Hypocrite," muttered the giant.

At length the reason came out, under pressure: The Patriot had been (in the words of the labor man) making a big row over the arrest of certain labor organizers, in one of the recurrent outbreaks against the Steel Trust, opposed by that organization's systematic and tyrannous method of oppression. So far, so good. But why hadn't the paper said a word about the murder of strikers' wives and children out at the Veridian Lumber Company's mills in Oregon; an outrage far surpassing anything ever laid to the account of the Steel Trust? Simple reason, answered Banneker; there had been no news of it over the wires. No; of course there hadn't. The Amalgamated Wire Association (another tool of capitalism) had suppressed it; wouldn't let any strike stuff get on the wires that it could keep off. Then how,

asked Banneker, could it be expected —? McClintick interrupted in his voice of controlled passion; had Mr. Banneker ever heard of the Chicago Transcript (naming the leading morning paper); had he ever read it? Well, The Transcript — which, he, McClintick, hated strongly as an organ of money — nevertheless did honestly gather and publish news, as he was constrained huskily to admit. It had the Veridian story; was still running it from time to time. Therefore, if Mr. Banneker was interested, on behalf of The Patriot —

Certainly, The Patriot was interested; would obtain and publish the story in full, if it was as Mr. McClintick represented, with due editorial comment.

"Will it?" grumbled McClintick, gave his hat a look of mingled hope and skepticism, put it on, and went away.

"Now, what's wrong with that chap's mental digestion?" Banneker inquired of Edmonds, who had sat quiet throughout the interview. "What is he holding back?"

"Plenty," returned the veteran in a tone which might have served for echo of the labor man's gloom.

"Do you know the Veridian story?"

"Yes. I've just checked it up."

"What's the milk in that cocoanut?"

"Sour!" said Edmonds with such energy that Banneker turned to look at him direct. "The principal owner of Veridian is named Marrineal. Where you going, Ban?"

"To see the principal owner of the name," said Banneker grimly.

The quest took him to the big house on upper Fifth Avenue. Marrineal heard his editorial writer with impassive face.

"So the story has got here," he remarked.

"Yes. Do you own Veridian?"

"No."

Hope rose within Banneker. "You don't?"

"My mother does. She's in Europe. A rather innocent old person. The innocence of age, perhaps. Quite old." All of this in a perfectly tranquil voice.

"Have you seen The Chicago Transcript? It's an ugly story."

"Very. I've sent a man out to the camp. There won't be any more shootings."

"It comes rather late. I've told McClintick, the labor man who comes from Wyoming, that we'll carry the story, if we verify it."

Marrineal raised his eyes slowly to Banneker's stern face. "Have you?" he said coolly. "Now, as to the mayoralty campaign; what do you think of running a page feature of Laird's reforms, as President of the Board, tracing each one down to its effect and showing what any backward step would mean? By the way, Laird is going to be pretty heavily obligated to The Patriot if he's elected."

For half an hour they talked politics, nothing else.

At the office Edmonds was making a dossier of the Veridian reports. It was ready when Banneker returned.

"Let it wait," said Banneker.

Prudence ordained that he should throw the troublous stuff into the waste-basket. He wondered if he was becoming prudent, as another man might wonder whether he was becoming old. At any rate, he would make no decision until he had talked it over with Io. Not only did he feel instinctive confidence in her sense of fair play; but also this relationship of interest in his affairs, established by her, was the opportunity of his closest approach; an intimacy of spirit assured and subtle. He hoped that she would come early on Saturday evening.

But she did not. Some dinner party had claimed her, and it was after eleven when she arrived with Archie Densmore. At once Banneker took her aside and laid before her the whole matter.

"Poor Ban!" she said softly. "It isn't so simple, having power to play with, is it?"

"But how am I to handle this?"

"The mills belong to Mr. Marrineal's mother, you said?"

"Practically they do."

"And she is —?"

"A silly and vain old fool."

"Is that his opinion of her?"

"Necessarily. But he's fond of her."

"Will he really try to remedy conditions, do you think?"

"Oh, yes. So far as that goes."

"Then I'd drop it."

"Print nothing at all?"

"Not a word."

"That isn't what I expected from you. Why do you advise it?"

"Loyalty."

"The paralytic virtue," said Banneker with such bitterness of conviction that Io answered:

"I suppose you don't mean that to be simply clever."

"It's true, isn't it?"

"There's a measure of truth in it. But, Ban, you can't use Mr. Marrineal's own paper to expose conditions in Mr. Marrineal's mother's mills. If he'd even directed you to hold off —"

"That's his infernal cleverness. I'd have told him to go to the devil."

"And resigned?"

"Of course."

"You can resign now," she pointed out. "But I think you'd be foolish. You can do such big things. You *are* doing such big things with The Patriot. Cousin Billy Enderby says that if Laird is elected it will be your doing. Where else could you find such opportunity?"

"Tell me this, Io," he said, after a moment of heavy-browed brooding very unlike his usual blithe certainty of bearing. "Suppose that lumber property were my own, and this thing had broken out."

"Oh, I'd say to print it, every word," she answered promptly. "Or" — she spoke very slowly and with a tremor of color flickering in her cheeks — "if it were mine, I'd tell you to print it."

He looked up with a transfigured face. His hand fell on hers, in the covert of the little shelter of plants behind which they sat. "Do you realize what that implies?" he questioned.

"Perfectly," she answered in her clear undertone.

He bent over to her hand, which turned, soft palm up, to meet

his lips. She whispered a warning and he raised his head quickly. Ely Ives had passed near by.

"Marrineal's familiar," said Banneker. "I wonder how he got here. Certainly I didn't ask him. . . . Very well, Io. I'll compromise. But. . . I don't think I'll put that quotation from the Areopagitica at the head of my column. That will have to wait. Perhaps it will have to wait until I — we get a paper of our own."

"Poor Ban!" whispered Io.

## Chapter VIII

Once a month Marrineal gave a bachelor dinner of Lucullan repute. The company, though much smaller than the gatherings at The House With Three Eyes, covered a broader and looser social range. Having declined several of his employer's invitations in succession on the well-justified plea of work, Banneker felt it incumbent upon him to attend one of these events, and accordingly found himself in a private dining-room of the choicest of restaurants, tabled with a curiously assorted group of financiers, editors, actors, a small selection of the more raffish members of The Retreat including Delavan Eyre; Ely Ives; an elderly Jewish lawyer of unsavory reputation, enormous income, and real and delicate scholarship; Herbert Cressey, a pair of the season's racing-kings, an eminent art connoisseur, and a smattering of men-about-town. Seated between the lawyer and one of the racing-men, Banneker, as the dinner progressed, found himself watching Delavan Eyre, opposite, who was drinking with sustained intensity, but without apparent effect upon his debonair bearing. Banneker thought to read a haunting fear in his eyes, and was cogitating upon what it might portend, when his attention was distracted by Ely Ives, who had been requested (as he announced) to exhibit his small skill at some minor sleight-of-hand tricks. The skill, far from justifying its possessor's modest estimate, was so unusual as to provoke expressions of admiration from Mr. Stecklin, the lawyer on Banneker's right.

"Oh, yes; hypnotism too," said Ely Ives briskly, after twenty minutes of legerdemain. "Child's play."

"Now, who suggested hypnotism?" murmured Stecklin in his limpid and confidential undertone, close to Banneker's ear. "You? I? No! No one, *I* think."

So Banneker thought, and was the more interested in Ives's procedure. Though the drinking had been heavy at his end of the table, he seemed quite unaffected, was now tripping from man to man, peering into the eyes of each, "to find an appropriate sub-

ject," as he said. Delavan Eyre roused himself out of a semi-torpor as the wiry little prowler stared down at him.

"What's the special idea?" he demanded.

"Just a bit of mesmerism," explained the other. "I'll try you for a subject. If you'll stand up, feet apart, eyes closed, I'll hypnotize you so that you'll fall over at a movement."

"You can't do it," retorted Eyre.

"For a bet," Ives came back.

"A hundred?"

"Double it if you like."

"You're on." Eyre, slowly swallowing the last of a brandy-and-soda, rose, reaching into his pocket.

"Not necessary, between gentlemen," said Ely Ives with a gesture just a little too suave.

"Ah, yes," muttered the lawyer at Banneker's side. "Between gentlemen. Eck-xactly."

Pursuant to instructions, Eyre stood with his feet a few inches apart and his eyes closed. "At the word, you bring your heels together. Click! And you keep your balance. If you can. For the two hundred. Any one else want in?...No?...Ready, Mr. Eyre. Now! *Hep!*"

The heels clicked, but with a stuttering, weak impact. Eyre, bulky and powerful, staggered, toppled to the left.

"Hold up there!" His neighbor propped him, and was clutched in his grasp.

"Hands off!" said Eyre thickly. "Sorry, Banks! Let me try that again. Oh, the bet's yours, Mr. Ives," he added, as that keen gambler began to enter a protest. "Send you a check in the morning — if that'll be all right."

Herbert Cressey, hand in pocket, was at his side instantly. "Pay him now, Del," he said in a tone which did not conceal his contemptuous estimate of Ives. "Here's money, if you haven't it."

"No; no! A check will be *quite* all right," protested Ives. "At your convenience."

Others gathered about, curious and interested. Banneker, puzzled by a vague suspicion which he sought to formulate, was aware of a low runnel of commentary at his ear.

"Very curious. Shrewd; yes. A clever fellow. . . . Sad, too."

"Sad?" He turned sharply on the lawyer of unsavory suits. "What is sad about it? A fool and his money! Is that tragedy?"

"Comedy, my friend. Always comedy. This also, perhaps. But grim. . . . Our friend there who is so clever of hand and eye; he is not perhaps a medical man?"

"Yes; he is. What connection — Good God!" he cried, as a flood of memory suddenly poured light upon a dark spot in some of his forgotten reading.

"Ah? You know? Yes; I have had such a case in my legal practice. Died of an — an error. He made a mistake — in a bottle, which he purchased for that purpose. But this one — he elects to live and face it —"

"Does he know it?"

"Obviously. One can see the dread in his eyes. Some of his friends know it — and his family, I am told. But he does not know this interesting little experiment of our friend. Profitable, too, eh? One wonders how he came to suspect. A medical man, though; a keen eye. Of course."

"Damn him," said Banneker quietly. "General paralysis?"

"Eck-xactly. Twelve, maybe fifteen years ago, a little recklessness. A little overheating of the blood. Perhaps after a dinner like this. The poison lies dormant; a snake asleep. Harms no one. Not himself; not another. Until — something here" — he tapped the thick black curls over the base of his brain. "All that ruddy strength, that lusty good-humor passing on courageously — for he is a brave man, Eyre — to slow torture and — and the end. Grim, eh?"

Banneker reached for a drink. "How long?" he asked.

"As for that, he is very strong. It might be slow. One prays not."

"At any rate, that little reptile, Ives, shan't have his profit of it." Banneker rose and, disdaining even the diplomacy of an excuse, drew Ely Ives aside.

"That bet of yours was a joke, Ives," he prescribed.

Ives studied him in silence, wishing that he had watched, through the dinner, how much drink he took.

"A joke?" he asked coolly. "I don't understand you."

"Try," advised Banneker with earnestness. "I happen to have read that luetic diagnosis, myself. A joke, Ives, so far as the two hundred goes."

"What do you expect me to do?" asked the other.

"Tear up the check, when it comes. Make what explanation your ingenuity can devise. That's your affair. But don't cash that check, Ives. For if you do — I dislike to threaten —"

"You don't need to threaten me, Mr. Banneker," interrupted Ives eagerly. "If you think it wasn't a fair bet, your word is enough for me. That goes. It's off. I think just that of you. I'm a friend of yours, as I hope to prove to you some day. I don't lay this up against you; not for a minute."

Not trusting himself to make answer to this proffer, Banneker turned away to find his host and make his adieus. As he left, he saw Delavan Eyre, flushed but composed, sipping a liqueur and listening with courteous appearance of appreciation to a vapid and slobbering story of one of the racing magnates. A debauchee, a cumberer of the earth, useless, selfish, scandalous of life — and Banneker, looking at him with pitiful eyes, paid his unstinted tribute to the calm and high courage of the man.

Walking slowly home in the cool air, Banneker gave thanks for a drink-proof head. He had need of it; he wanted to think and think clearly. How did this shocking revelation about Eyre affect his own hopes of Io? That she would stand by her husband through his ordeal Banneker never doubted for an instant. Her pride of fair play would compel her to that. It came to his mind that this was her other and secret reason for not divorcing Eyre; for maintaining still the outward form of a marriage which had ceased to exist long before. For a lesser woman, he realized with a thrill, it would have been a reason for divorcing him... Well, here was a barrier, indeed, against which he was helpless. Opposed by a loyalty such as Io's he could only be silent and wait.

In the next few weeks she was very good to him. Not only did she lunch with him several times, but she came to the Saturday nights of The House With Three Eyes, sometimes with Archie Densmore alone, more often with a group of her own set, after a

dinner or a theater party. Always she made opportunity for a little talk apart with her host; talks which any one might have heard, for they were concerned almost exclusively with the affairs of The Patriot, especially in its relation to the mayoralty campaign now coming to a close. Yet, impersonal though the discussions might be, Banneker took from them a sense of ever-increasing intimacy and communion, if it were only from a sudden, betraying quiver in her voice, an involuntary, unconscious look from the shadowed eyes. Whatever of resentment he had cherished for her earlier desertion was now dissipated; he was wholly hers, content, despite all his passionate longing for her, with what she chose to give. In her own time she would be generous, as she was brave and honorable....

She was warmly interested in the election of Robert Laird to the mayoralty, partly because she knew him personally, partly because the younger element of society had rather "gone in for politics" that year, on the reform side. Banneker had to admit to her, as the day drew close, that the issue was doubtful. Though The Patriot's fervid support had been a great asset to the cause, it was now, for the moment, a liability to the extent that it was being fiercely denounced in the Socialist organ, The Summons, as treasonable to the interests of the working-classes. The Summons charged hypocrisy, citing the case of the Veridian strike.

"That is McClintick?" asked Io.

"He's back of it, naturally. But The Summons has been waiting its chance. Jealous of our influence in the field it's trying to cultivate."

"McClintick is right," remarked Io thoughtfully.

Banneker laughed. "Oh, Io! It's such a relief to get a clear view and an honest one from some one else. There's no one in the office except Russell Edmonds, and he's away now....You think McClintick is right? So do I."

"But so are you. You had to do as you did about the story. If any one is to blame, it is Mr. Marrineal. Yet how can one blame him? He had to protect his mother. It's a fearfully complicated phenomenon, a newspaper, isn't it, Ban?"

"Io, the soul of man is simple and clear compared with the soul of a newspaper."

"If it has a soul."

"Of course it has. It's got to have. Otherwise what is it but a machine?"

"Which is The Patriot's; yours or Mr. Marrineal's? I can't," said Io quaintly, "quite see them coalescing."

"I wonder if Marrineal has a soul," mused Banneker.

"If he hasn't one of his own, let him keep his hands off yours!" said Io in a flash of feminine jealousy. "He's done enough already with his wretched mills. What shall you do about the attack in The Summons?"

"Ignore it. It would be difficult to answer. Besides, people easily forget."

"A dangerous creed, Ban. And a cynical one. I don't want you to be cynical."

"I never shall be again, unless —"

"Unless?" she prompted.

"It rests with you, Io," he said quietly.

At once she took flight. "Am I to be keeper of your spirit?" she protested. "It's bad enough to be your professional adviser. . . . Why don't you invite a crowd of us down to get the election returns?" she suggested.

"Make up your party," assented Banneker. "Keep it small; say a dozen, and we can use my office."

On the fateful evening there duly appeared Io with a group of a dozen friends. From the first, it was a time of triumph. Laird took the lead and kept it. By midnight, the result was a certainty. In a balcony speech from his headquarters the victor had given generous recognition for his success to The Patriot, mentioning Banneker by name. When the report reached them Esther Forbes solemnly crowned the host with a wreath composed of the "flimsy" on which the rescript of the speech had come in.

"Skoal to Ban!" she cried. "Maker of kings and mayors and things. Skoal! As you're a viking or something of the sort, the Norse salutation is appropriate."

"It ought to be Danish to be accurate," he smiled.

"Well, that's a hardy, seafaring race," she chattered. "And that reminds me. Come on out to the South Seas with us."

"Charmed," he returned. "When do we start? To-morrow?"

"Oh, I'm not joking. You've certainly earned a vacation. And of course you needn't enlist for the whole six months if that is too long. Dad has let me have the yacht. There'll only be a dozen. Io's going along."

Banneker shot one startled, incredulous look at Io Eyre, and instantly commanded himself, to the point of controlling his voice to gayety as he replied:

"And who would tell the new mayor now he should run the city, if I deserted him? No, Esther, I'm afraid I'm chained to this desk. Ask me sometime when you're cruising as far as Coney Island."

Io sat silent, and with a set smile, listening to Herbert Cressey's account of an election row in the district where he was volunteer watcher. When the party broke up, she went home with Densmore without giving Banneker the chance of a word with her. It seemed to him that there was a mute plea for pardon in her face as she bade him good-night.

At noon next day she called him on the 'phone.

"Just to tell you that I'm coming as usual Saturday evening," she said.

"When do you leave on your cruise?" he asked.

"Not until next week. I'll tell you when I see you. Good-bye."

Never had Banneker seen Io in such difficult mood as she exhibited on the Saturday. She had come early to The House With Three Eyes, accompanied by Densmore who looked in just for one drink before going to a much-touted boxing-match in Jersey. Through the evening she deliberately avoided seeing Banneker alone for so much as the space of a query put and answered, dividing her attention between an enraptured master of the violin who had come after his concert, and an aged and bewildered inventor who, in a long career of secluded toil, had never beheld anything like this brilliant creature with her intelligent and quickening interest in what he had to tell her. Rivalry between the two geniuses inspired the musician to make an offer which he would hardly have granted to royalty itself.

"After a time, when zese chatterers are gon-away, I shall play for you. Is zere some one here who can accompany properly?"

Necessarily Io sent for Banneker to find out. Yes; young Mackey was coming a little later; he was a brilliant amateur and would be flattered at the opportunity. With a direct insistence difficult to deny, Banneker drew Io aside for a moment. Her eyes glinted dangerously as she faced him, alone for the moment, with the question that was the salute before the crossing of blades.

"Well?"

"Are you really going, Io?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"Say that, for one reason" — he smiled faintly, but resolutely — "The Patriot needs your guiding inspiration."

"All The Patriot's troubles are over. It's plain sailing now."

"What of The Patriot's editor?"

"Quite able to take care of himself."

Into his voice there suffused the first ring of anger that she had ever heard from him; cold and formidable. "That won't do, Io. Why?"

"Because I choose."

"A child's answer. Why?"

"Do you want to be flattered?" She raised to his, eyes that danced with an impish and perverse light. "Call it escape, if you wish."

"From me?"

"Or from myself. Wouldn't you like to think that I'm afraid of you?"

"I shouldn't like to think that you're afraid of anything."

"I'm not." But her tone was that of the defiance which seeks to encourage itself.

"I'd call it a desertion," he said steadily.

"Oh, no! You're secure. You need nothing but what you've got. Power, reputation, position, success. What more can heart desire?" she taunted.

"You."

She quivered under the blunt word, but rallied to say lightly: "Six months isn't long. Though I may stretch it to a year."

"It's too long for endurance."

"Oh, you'll do very well without me, Ban."

"Shall I? When am I to see you again before you go?"

Her raised eyebrows were like an affront. "Are we to see each other again? Of course, it would be polite of you to come to the train."

There was a controlled and dangerous gravity in his next question. "Io, have we quarreled?"

"How absurd! Of course not."

"Then —"

"If you knew how I dislike fruitless explanations!"

He rose at once. Io's strong and beautiful hands, which had been lying in her lap, suddenly interlocked, clenching close together. But her face disclosed nothing. The virtuoso, who had been hopefully hovering in the offing, bore down to take the vacated chair. He would have found the lovely young Mrs. Eyre distrait and irresponsive had he not been too happy babbling of his own triumphs to notice.

"Soon zey haf growed thin, zis crowd," said the violinist, who took pride in his mastery of idiom. "Zen, when zere remains but a small few, I play for you. You sit *zere*, in ze leetle garden of flowers." He indicated the secluded seat near the stairway, where she had sat with Ban on the occasion of her first visit to The House With Three Eyes. "Not too far; not too near. From zere you shall not see; but you shall think you hear ze stars make for you harmonies of ze high places."

Young Mackey, having arrived, commended himself to the condescending master by a meekly worshipful attitude. Barely a score of people remained in the great room. The word went about that they were in for one of those occasional treats which made The House With Three Eyes unique. The fortunate lingerers disposed themselves about the room. Io slipped into the nook designated for her. Banneker was somewhere in the background; her veiled glance could not discover where. The music began.

They played Tschaikowsky first, the tender and passionate "Melodie"; then a lilting measure from Debussy's "Faun," followed by a solemnly lovely Brahms arrangement devised by the virtuoso himself. At the dying-out of the applause, the violinist

addressed himself to the nook where Io was no more than a vague, faërie figure to his eyes, misty through interlaced bloom and leafage.

"Now, Madame, I play you somezing of a American. Ver' beautiful, it is. Not for violin. For voice, contralto. I sing it to you — on ze G-string, which weep when it sing; weep for lost dreams. It is called 'Illusion,' ze song."

He raised his bow, and at the first bar Io's heart gave a quick, thick sob within her breast. It was the music which Camilla Van Arsdale had played that night when winds and forest leaves murmured the overtones; when earth and heaven were hushed to hear.

"Oh, Ban!" cried Io's spirit.

Noiseless and swift, Banneker, answering the call, bent over her. She whispered, softly, passionately, her lips hardly stirring the melody-thrilled air.

"How could I hurt you so! I'm going because I must; because I daren't stay. You can understand, Ban!"

The music died. "Yes," said Banneker. Then, "Don't go, Io!"

"I must. I'll — I'll see you before. When we're ourselves. We can't talk now. Not with this terrible music in our blood."

She rose and went forward to thank the player with such a light in her eyes and such a fervor in her words that he mentally added another to his list of conquests.

The party broke up. After that magic music, people wanted to be out of the light and the stir; to carry its pure passion forth into the dark places, to cherish and dream it over again.... Banneker sat before the broad fireplace in the laxity of a still grief. Io was going away from him. For a six-month. For a year. For an eternity. Going away from him, bearing his whole heart with her, as she had left him after the night on the river, left him to the searing memory of that mad, sweet cleavage of her lips to his, the passionate offer of her awakened womanhood in uttermost surrender of life at the roaring gates of death....

Footsteps, light, firm, unhesitant, approached across the broad floor from the hallway. Banneker sat rigid, incredulous, afraid

to stir, as the sleeper fears to break the spell of a tenuous and lovely dream, until Io's voice spoke his name. He would have jumped to his feet, but the strong pressure of her hands on his shoulders restrained him.

"No. Stay as you are."

"I thought you had gone," he said thickly.

A great log toppled in the fireplace, showering its sparks in prodigal display.

"Do you remember our fire, on the river-bank?" said the voice of the girl, Io, across the years.

"While I live."

"Just you and I. Man and woman. Alone in the world. Sometimes I think it has always been so with us."

"We have no world of our own, Io," he said sadly.

"Heresy, Ban; heresy! Of course we have. An inner world. If we could forget — everything outside."

"I am not good at forgetting."

He felt her fingers, languid and tremulous, at his throat, her heart's strong throb against his shoulder as she bent, the sweet breath of her whisper stirring the hair at his temple:

"Try, Ban."

Her mouth closed down upon his, flower-sweet, petal-light, and was withdrawn. She leaned back, gazing at him from half-closed, inscrutable eyes.

"That's for good-bye, Io?" With all his self-control, he could not keep his voice steady.

"There have been too many good-byes between us," she murmured.

He lifted his head, attentive to a stir at the door, which immediately passed.

"I thought that was Archie, come after you."

"Archie isn't coming."

"Then I'll send for the car and take you home."

"Won't you understand, Ban? I'm not going home."

## Chapter IX

Io Eyre was one of those women before whom Scandal seems to lose its teeth if not its tongue. She had always assumed the superb attitude toward the world in which she moved. "They say? — What do they say? — Let them say!" might have been her device, too genuinely expressive of her to be consciously contemptuous. Where another might have suffered in reputation by constant companionship with a man as brilliant, as conspicuous, as phenomenal of career as Errol Banneker, Io passed on her chosen way, serene and scatheless.

Tongues wagged, indeed; whispers spread; that was inevitable. But to this Io was impervious. When Banneker, troubled lest any breath should sully her reputation who was herself unsullied, in his mind, would have advocated caution, she refused to consent.

"Why should I skulk?" she said. "I'm not ashamed."

So they met and lunched or dined at the most conspicuous restaurants, defying Scandal, whereupon Scandal began to wonder whether, all things considered, there were anything more to it than one of those flirtations which, after a time of faithful adherence, become standardized into respectability and a sort of tolerant recognition. What, after all, is respectability but the brand of the formalist upon standardization?

With the distaste and effort which Ban always felt in mentioning her husband's name to Io, he asked her one day about any possible danger from Eyre.

"No," she said with assurance. "I owe Del nothing. That is understood between us."

"But if the tittle-tattle that must be going the rounds should come to his ears —"

"If the truth should come to his ears," she replied tranquilly, "it would make no difference."

Ban looked at her, hesitant to be convinced.

"Yes; it's so," she asseverated, nodding. "After his outbreak

in Paris — it was on our wedding trip — I gave him a choice. I would either divorce him, or I would hold myself absolutely free of him so far as any claim, actual or moral, went. The one thing I undertook was that I would never involve his name in any open scandal."

"He hasn't been so particular," said Ban gloomily.

"Of late he has. Since I had Cousin Billy Enderby go to him about the dancer. I won't say he's run absolutely straight since. Poor Del! He can't, I suppose. But, at least, he's respected the bargain to the extent of being prudent. I shall respect mine to the same extent."

"Io," he burst out passionately, "there's only one thing in the world I really want; for you to be free of him absolutely."

She shook her head. "Oh, Ban! Can't you be content — with me? I've told you I am free of him. I'm not really his wife."

"No; you're mine," he declared with jealous intensity.

"Yes; I'm yours." Her voice trembled, thrilled. "You don't know yet how wholly I'm yours. Oh, it isn't *that* alone, Ban. But in spirit and thought. In the world of shadowed and lovely things that we made for ourselves long ago."

"But to have to endure this atmosphere of secrecy, of stealth, of danger to you," he fretted. "You could get your divorce."

"No; I can't. You don't understand."

"Perhaps I do understand," he said gently.

"About Del?" She drew a quick breath. "How could you?"

"Wholly through an accident. A medical man, a slimy little reptile, surprised his secret and inadvertently passed it on."

She leaned forward to him from her corner of the settee, all courage and truth. "I'm glad that you know, though I couldn't tell you, myself. You'll see now that I couldn't leave him to face it alone."

"No. You couldn't. If you did, it wouldn't be Io."

"Ah, and I love you for that, too," she whispered, her voice and eyes one caress to him. "I wonder how I ever made myself believe that I could get over loving you! Now, I've got to pay for my mistake. . . . Ban, do you remember the 'Babbling Babson'? The imbecile who saw me from the train that day?"

"I remember every smallest thing in any way connected with you."

"I love to hear you say that. It makes up for the bad times, in between.... The Babbler has turned up. He's been living abroad for a few years. I saw him at a tea last week."

"Did he say anything?"

"Yes. He tried to be coy and facetious. I snubbed him soundly. Perhaps it wasn't wise."

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Well...he used to have the reputation of writing on the sly for The Searchlight."

"That sewer-sheet! You don't think he'd dare do anything of the sort about us? Why, what would he have to go on?"

"What does The Searchlight have to go on in most of its lies, and hints, and innuendoes?"

"But, Io, even if it did publish —"

"It mustn't," she said. "Ban, if it did — it would make it impossible for us to go on as we have been. Don't you see that it would?"

He turned sallow under his ruddy skin. "Then I'll stop it, one way or another. I'll put the fear of God into that filthy old worm that runs the blackmail shop. The first thing is to find out, though, whether there's anything in it. I did hear a hint..." He lost himself in musings, trying to recall an occult remark which the obsequious Ely Ives had made to him sometime before. "And I know where I can do it," he ended.

To go to Ives for anything was heartily distasteful to him. But this was a necessity. He cautiously questioned the unofficial factotum of his employer. Had Ives heard anything of a projected attack on him in The Searchlight? Why, yes; Ives had (naturally, since it was he and not Babson who had furnished the material). In fact, he had an underground wire into the office of that weekly of spice and scurrility which might be tapped to oblige a friend.

Banneker winced at the characterization, but confessed that he would be appreciative of any information. In three days a galley proof of the paragraph was in his hands. It confirmed his angriest fears. Publication of it would smear Io's name with

scandal, and, by consequence, direct the leering gaze of the world upon their love.

"What is this; blackmail?" he asked Ives.

"Might be."

"Who wrote it?"

"Reads like the old buzzard's own style."

"I'll go and see him," said Banneker, half to himself.

"You can go, but I don't think you'll see him." Ives set forth in detail the venerable editor's procedure as to troublesome callers. It was specific and curious. Foreseeing that he would probably have to fight with his opponent's weapons, Banneker sought out Russell Edmonds and asked for all the information regarding The Searchlight and its proprietor-editor in the veteran's possession. Edmonds had a fund of it.

"But it won't smoke him out," he said. "That skunk lives in a deep hole."

"If I can't smoke him out, I'll blast him out," declared Banneker, and set himself to the composition of an editorial which consumed the remainder of the working day.

With a typed copy in his pocket, he called, a little before noon, at the office of The Searchlight and sent in his card to Major Bussey. The Major was not in. When was he expected? As for that, there was no telling; he was quite irregular. Very well, Mr. Banneker would wait. Oh, that was quite useless; was it about something in the magazine; wouldn't one of the other editors do? Without awaiting an answer, the anæmic and shrewd-faced office girl who put the questions disappeared, and presently returned, followed by a tailor-made woman of thirty-odd, with a delicate, secret-keeping mouth and heavy-lidded, deep-hued eyes, altogether a seductive figure. She smiled confidently up at Banneker.

"I've always wanted so much to meet you," she disclosed, giving him a quick, gentle hand pressure. "So has Major Bussey. Too bad he's out of town. Did you want to see him personally?"

"Quite personally." Banneker returned her smile with one even more friendly and confiding.

"Wouldn't I do? Come into my office, won't you? I represent him in some things."

"Not in this one, I hope," he replied, following her to an inner room. "It is about a paragraph not yet published, which might be misconstrued."

"Oh, I don't think any one could possibly misconstrue it," she retorted, with a flash of wicked mirth.

"You know the paragraph to which I refer, then."

"I wrote it."

Banneker regarded her with grave and appreciative urbanity. All was going precisely as Ely Ives had prognosticated; the denial of the presence of the editor; the appearance of this alluring brunette as whipping-girl to assume the burden of his offenses with the calm impunity of her sex and charm.

"Congratulations," he said. "It is very clever."

"It's quite true, isn't it?" she returned innocently.

"As authentic, let us say, as your authorship of the paragraph."

"You don't think I wrote it? What object should I have in trying to deceive you?"

"What, indeed! By the way, what is Major Bussey's price?"

"Oh, Mr. Banneker!" Was it sheer delight in deviltry, or amusement at his direct and unstrategic method that sparkled in her face. "You surely don't credit the silly stories of — well, blackmail, about us!"

"It might be money," he reflected. "But, on the whole, I think it's something else. Something he wants from The Patriot, perhaps. Immunity? Would that be it? Not that I mean, necessarily, to deal."

"What is your proposition?" she asked confidentially.

"How can I advance one when I don't know what your principal wants?"

"The paragraph was written in good faith," she asserted.

"And could be withdrawn in equal good faith?"

Her laugh was silvery clear. "Very possibly. Under proper representations."

"Then don't you think I'd better deal direct with the Major?"

She studied his face. "Yes," she began, and instantly refuted herself. "No. I don't trust you. There's trouble under that smooth smile of yours."

"But *you*'re not afraid of me, surely," said Banneker. He had found out one important point; her manner when she said "Yes" indicated that the proprietor was in the building. Now he continued: "Are you?"

"I don't know. I think I am." There was a little catch in her breath. "I think you'd be dangerous to any woman."

Banneker, his eyes fixed on hers, played for time and a further lead with a banality. "You're pleased to flatter me."

"Aren't you pleased to be flattered?" she returned provocatively.

He put his hand on her wrist. She swayed to him with a slow, facile yielding. He caught her other wrist, and the grip of his two hands seemed to bite into the bone.

"So you're *that* kind, too, are you!" he sneered, holding her eyes as cruelly as he had clutched her wrists. "Keep quiet! Now, you're to do as I tell you."

(Ely Ives, in describing the watchwoman at the portals of scandal, had told him that she was susceptible to a properly timed bluff. "A woman she had slandered once stabbed her; since then you can get her nerve by a quick attack. Treat her rough.")

She stared at him, fearfully, half-hypnotized.

"Is that the door leading to Bussey's office? Don't speak! Nod."

Dumb and stricken, she obeyed.

"I'm going there. Don't you dare make a movement or a noise. If you do — I'll come back."

Shifting his grasp, he caught her up and with easy power tossed her upon a broad divan. From its springy surface she shot up, as it seemed to him, halfway to the ceiling, rigid and staring, a ludicrous simulacrum of a glassy-eyed doll. He heard the protesting "ping!" and "berr-rr-rr" of a broken spring as she fell back. The traverse of a narrow hallway and a turn through a half-open door took him into the presence of bearded benevolence making notes at a desk.

"How did you get here? And who the devil are you?" demanded the guiding genius of The Searchlight, looking up irritably. He raised his voice. "Con!" he called.

From a side room appeared a thick, heavy-shouldered man with a feral countenance, who slouched aggressively forward, as the intruder announced himself.

"My name is Banneker."

"Cheest!" hissed the thick bouncer in tones of dismay, and stopped short.

Turning, Banneker recognized him as one of the policemen whom his evidence had retired from the force in the wharf-gang investigation.

"Oh! Banneker," muttered the editor. His right hand moved slowly, stealthily, toward a lower drawer.

"Cut it, Major!" implored Con in acute anguish. "Canche' see he's gotche' covered through his pocket!"

The stealthy hand returned to the sight of all men and fussed among some papers on the desk-top. Major Bussey said peevishly:

"What do you want with me?"

"Kill that paragraph."

"What par —"

"Don't fence with me," struck in Banneker sharply. "You know what one."

Major Bussey swept his gaze around the room for help or inspiration. The sight of the burly ex-policeman, stricken and shifting his weight from one foot to the other, disconcerted him sadly; but he plucked up courage to say:

"The facts are well authent —"

Again Banneker cut him short. "Facts! There isn't the semblance of a fact in the whole thing. Hints, slurs, innuendoes."

"Libel does not exist when —" feebly began the editor, and stopped because Banneker was laughing at him.

"Suppose you read that," said the visitor, contemptuously tossing the typed script of his new-wrought editorial on the desk. "*That*'s libellous, if you choose. But I don't think you would sue."

Major Bussey read the caption, a typical Banneker eye-catcher, "The Rattlesnake Dies Out; But the Pen-Viper is Still With Us." "I don't care to indulge myself with your literary

efforts at present, Mr. Banneker," he said languidly. "Is this the answer to our paragraph?"

"Only the beginning. I propose to drive you out of town and suppress 'The Searchlight.'"

"A fair challenge. I'll accept it."

"I was prepared to have you take that attitude."

"Really, Mr. Banneker; you could hardly expect to come here and blackmail me by threats —"

"Now for my alternative," proceeded the visitor calmly. "You are proposing to publish a slur on the reputation of an innocent woman who —"

"Innocent!" murmured the Major with malign relish.

"Look out, Major!" implored Con, the body-guard. "He's a killer, he is."

"I don't know that I'm particularly afraid of you, after all," declared the exponent of The Searchlight, and Banneker felt a twinge of dismay lest he might have derived, somewhence, an access of courage. "A Wild West shooting is one thing, and cold-blooded, premeditated murder is another. You'd go to the chair."

"Cheerfully," assented Banneker.

Bussey, lifting the typed sheets before him, began to read. Presently his face flushed.

"Why, if you print this sort of thing, you'd have my office mobbed," he cried indignantly.

"It's possible."

"It's outrageous! And this — if this isn't an incitement to lynching — You wouldn't dare publish this!"

"Try me."

Major Bussey's wizened and philanthropic face took on the cast of careful thought. At length he spoke with the manner of an elder bestowing wisdom upon youth.

"A controversy such as this would do nobody any good. I have always been opposed to journalistic backbitings. Therefore we will let this matter lie. I will kill the paragraph. Not that I'm afraid of your threats; nor of your pen, for that matter. But in the best interests of our common profession —"

"Good-day," said Banneker, and walked out, leaving the Major stranded upon the ebb tide of his platitudes.

Banneker retailed the episode to Edmonds, for his opinion.

"He's afraid of your gun, a little," pronounced the expert; "and more of your pen. I think he'll keep faith in this."

"As long as I hold over him the threat of The Patriot."

"Yes."

"And no longer?"

"No longer. It's a vengeful kind of vermin, Ban."

"Pop, am I a common, ordinary blackmailer? Or am I not?"

The other shook his head, grayed by a quarter-century of struggles and problems. "It's a strange game, the newspaper game," he opined.

## Chapter X

All had worked out, in the matter of The Searchlight, quite as much to Mr. Ely Ives's satisfaction as to that of Banneker. From his boasted and actual underground wire into that culture-bed of spiced sewage (at the farther end of which was the facile brunette whom the visiting editor had so harshly treated), he had learned the main details of the interview and reported them to Mr. Marrineal.

"Will Banneker now be good?" rhetorically queried Ives, pursing up his small face into an expression of judicious appreciation. "He *will* be good!"

Marrineal gave the subject his habitual calm and impersonal consideration. "He hasn't been lately," he observed. "Several of his editorials have had quite the air of challenge."

"That was before he turned blackmailer. Blackmail," philosophized the astute Ives, "is a gun that you've got to keep pointed all the time."

"I see. So long as he has Bussey covered by the muzzle of The Patriot, The Searchlight behaves itself."

"It does. But if ever he laid down his gun, Bussey would make hash of him and his lady-love."

"What about her?" interrogated Marrineal. "Do you really think —" His uplifted brows, sparse on his broad and candid forehead, consummated the question.

For reply the factotum gave him a succinct if distorted version of the romance in the desert.

"She dished him for Eyre," he concluded, "and now she's dishing Eyre for him."

"Bussey's got all this?" inquired Marrineal, and upon the other's careless "I suppose so," added, "It must grind his soul not to be able to use it."

"Or not to get paid for suppressing it," grinned Ives.

"But does Banneker understand that it's fear of his pen, and not of being killed, that binds Bussey?"

Ives nodded. "I've taken care to rub that in. Told him of other cases where the old Major was threatened with all sorts of manhandling; scared out of his wits at first, but always got over it and came back in The Searchlight, taking his chance of being killed. The old vulture really isn't a coward, though he's a wary bird."

"Would Banneker really kill him, do you think?"

"I wouldn't insure his life for five cents," returned the other with conviction. "Your editor is crazy-mad over this Mrs. Eyre. So there you have him delivered, shorn and helpless, and Delilah doesn't even suspect that she's acting as our agent."

Marrineal's eyes fixed themselves in a lifeless sort of stare upon a far corner of the ceiling. Recognizing this as a sign of inward cogitation, the vizier of his more private interests sat waiting. Without changing the direction of his gaze, the proprietor indicated a check in his ratiocination by saying incompletely:

"Now, if she divorced Eyre and married Banneker —"

Ives completed it for him. "That would spike The Searchlight's guns, you think? Perhaps. But if she were going to divorce Eyre, she'd have done it long ago, wouldn't she? I think she'll wait. He won't last long."

"Then our hold on Banneker, through his ability to intimidate The Searchlight, depends on the life of a paretic."

"Paretic is too strong a word — yet. But it comes to about that. Except — he'll want a lot of money to marry Io Eyre."

"He wants a lot, anyway," smiled Marrineal.

"He'll want more. She's an expensive luxury."

"He can get more. Any time when he chooses to handle The Patriot so that it attracts instead of offends the big advertisers."

"Why don't you put the screws on him now, Mr. Marrineal?" smirked Ives with thin-lipped malignancy.

Marrineal frowned. His cold blood inclined him to be deliberate; the ophidian habit, slow-moving until ready to strike. He saw no reason for risking a venture which became safer the further it progressed. Furthermore, he disliked direct, unsolicited advice. Ignoring Ives's remark he asked:

"How are his investments going?"

Ives grinned again. "Down. Who put him into United Thread? Do you know, sir?"

"Horace Vanney. He has been tipping it off quietly to the club lot. Wants to get out from under, himself."

"There's one thing about it, though, that puzzles me. If he took old Vanney's tip to buy for a rise, why did he go after the Sippiac Mills with those savage editorials? They're mainly responsible for the legislative investigation that knocked eight points off of United Thread."

"Probably to prove his editorial independence."

"To whom? You?"

"To himself," said Marrineal with an acumen quite above the shrewdness of an Ives to grasp.

But the latter nodded intelligently, and remarked: "If he's money-crazy you've got him, anyway, sooner or later. And now that he's woman-crazy, too —"

"You'll never understand just how sane Mr. Banneker is," broke in Marrineal coldly. He was a very sane man, himself.

"Well, a lot of the sane ones get stung on the Street," moralized Ives. "I guess the only way to beat that game is to get crazy and take all the chances. Mr. Banneker stands to drop half a year's salary in U. T. alone unless there's a turn."

Marrineal delivered another well-thought-out bit of wisdom. "If I'm any judge, he wants a paper of his own. Well. . .give me three years more of him and he can have it. But I don't think it'll make much headway against The Patriot, then."

"Three years? Bussey and The Searchlight ought to hold him that long. Unless, of course, he gets over his infatuation in the meantime."

"In that case," surmised Marrineal, eyeing him with distaste, "I suppose you think that he would equally lose interest in protecting her from The Searchlight."

"Well, what's a woman to expect!" said Ives blandly, and took his dismissal for the day.

It was only recently that Ives had taken to coming to The Patriot office. No small interest and conjecture were aroused among the editorial staff as to his exact status, stimulus to gossip

being afforded by the rumor that he had been, from Marrineal's privy purse, shifted to the office pay-roll. Russell Edmonds solved and imparted the secret to Banneker.

"Ives? Oh, he's the office sandbag."

"Translate, Pop. I don't understand.'

"It's an invention of Marrineal's. Very ingenious. It was devised as a weapon against libel suits. Suppose some local correspondent from Hohokus or Painted Post sends in a story on the Honorable Aminadab Quince that looks to be O. K., but is actually full of bad breaks. The Honorable Aminadab smells money in it and likes the smell. Starts a libel suit. On the facts, he's got us: the fellow that got pickled and broke up the Methodist revival wasn't Aminadab at all, but his tough brother. If it gets into court we're stung. Well, up goes little Weaselfoot Ives to Hohokus. Sniffs around and spooks around and is a good fellow at the hotel, and possibly spends a little money where it's most needed, and one day turns up at the Quince mansion. 'Senator, I represent The Patriot.' 'Don't want to see you at all. Talk to my lawyer.' 'But he might not understand my errand. It relates to an indictment handed down in 1884 for malversasion of school funds.' 'Young man, do you dare to intimate —' and so forth and so on; bluster and bluff and threat. Says Ives, very cool: 'Let me have your denial in writing and we'll print it opposite the certified copy of the indictment.' The old boy begins to whimper; 'That's outlawed. It was all wrong, anyway.' Ives is sympathetic, but stands pat. Drop the suit and The Patriot will be considerate and settle the legal fees. Aminadab drops, ten times out of ten. The sandbag has put him away."

"But there must be an eleventh case where there's nothing on the man that's suing."

"Say a ninety-ninth. One libel suit in a hundred may be brought in good faith. But we never settle until after Ives has done his little prowl."

"It sounds bad, Pop. But is it so bad, after all? We've got to protect ourselves against a hold-up."

"Dirty work, but somebody's got to do it: ay — yes? I agree with you. As a means of self-defense it is excusable. But the

operations of the sandbag have gone far beyond libel in Ives's hands."

"Have they? To what extent?"

"Any. His little private detective agency — he's got a couple of our porch-climbing, keyhole reporters secretly assigned to him at call for 'special work' — looks after any man we've got or are likely to have trouble with; advertisers who don't come across properly, city officials who play in with the other papers too much, politicians —"

"But that's rank blackmail!" exclaimed Banneker.

"Carried far enough it is. So far it's only private information for the private archives."

"Marrineal's?"

"Yes. He and his private counsel, old Mark Stecklin, are the keepers of them. Now, suppose Judge Enderby runs afoul of our interests, as he is bound to do sooner or later. Little Weaselfoot gets on his trail — probably is on it already — and he'll spend a year if necessary watching, waiting, sniffing out something that he can use as a threat or a bludgeon or a bargain."

"What quarrel have we got with Enderby?" inquired Banneker with lively interest.

"None, now. But we'll be after him hot and heavy within a year."

"Not the editorial page," declared Banneker.

"Well, I hope not. It would be rather a right-about, wouldn't it? But Marrineal isn't afraid of a right-about. You know his creed as to his readers: 'The public never remembers.' Of course, you realize what Marrineal is after, politically."

"No. He's never said a word to me."

"Nor to me. But others have. The mayoralty."

"For himself?"

"Of course. He's quietly building up his machine."

"But Laird will run for reëlection."

"He'll knife Laird."

"It's true Laird hasn't treated us very well, in the matter of backing our policies," admitted Banneker thoughtfully. "The Combined Street Railway franchise, for instance."

"He was right in that and you were wrong, Ban. He had to follow the comptroller there."

"Is that where our split with Enderby is going to come? Over the election?"

"Yes. Enderby is the brains and character back of the Laird administration. He represents the clean government crowd, with its financial power."

Banneker stirred fretfully in his chair. "Damn it!" he growled. "I wish we could run this paper *as* a newspaper and not as a chestnut rake."

"How sweet and simple life would be!" mocked the veteran. "Still, you know, if you're going to use The Patriot as a blunderbuss to point at the heads of your own enemies, you can't blame the owner if he —"

"You think Marrineal knows?" interposed Banneker sharply.

"About The Searchlight matter? You can bet on one thing, Ban. Everything that Ely Ives knows, Tertius Marrineal knows. So far as Ives thinks it advisable for him to know, that is. Over and above which Tertius is no fool, himself. You may have noticed that."

"It's bothered me from time to time," admitted the other dryly.

"It'll bother both of us more, presently," prophesied Edmonds.

"Then I've been playing direct into Marrineal's hands in attacking Laird on the franchise matter."

"Yes. Keep on."

"Strange advice from you, Pop. You think my position on that is wrong."

"What of that? You think it's right. Therefore, go ahead. Why quit a line of policy just because it obliges your employer? Don't be over-conscientious, son."

"I've suspected for some time that the political news was being adroitly manipulated against the administration. Has Marrineal tried to ring you in on that?"

"No; and he won't."

"Why not?"

"He knows that, in the main, I'm a Laird man. Laird is giving us what we asked for, an honest administration."

"Suppose, when Marrineal develops his plans, he comes to you, which would be his natural course, to handle the news end of the anti-Laird campaign. What would you do?"

"Quit."

Banneker sighed. "It's so easy for you."

"Not so easy as you think, son. Even though there's a lot of stuff being put over in the news columns that makes me sore and sick. Marrineal's little theory of using news as a lever is being put into practice pretty widely. Also we're selling it."

"Selling our news columns?"

"Some of 'em. For advertising. You're well out of any responsibility for that department. I'd resign to-morrow if it weren't for the fact that Marrineal still wants to cocker up the labor crowd for his political purposes, and so gives me a free hand in my own special line. By the way, he's got the Veridian matter all nicely smoothed out. Oh, my, yes! Fired the general manager, put in all sorts of reforms, recognized the union, the whole programme! That's to spike McClintick's guns if he tries to trot out Veridian again as proof that Marrineal is, at heart, anti-labor."

"Is he?"

"He's anti-anything that's anti-Marrineal, and pro-anything that's pro-Marrineal. Haven't you measured him yet? All policy, no principle; there's Mr. Tertius Marrineal for you.... Ban, it's really you that holds me to this shop." Through convolutions of smoke from his tiny pipe, the old stager regarded the young star of journalism with a quaint and placid affection. "Whatever rotten stuff is going on in the business and news department, your page goes straight and speaks clear.... I wonder how long Marrineal will stand for it...I wonder what he intends for the next campaign."

"If my proprietor runs for office, I can't very well not support him," said Banneker, troubled.

"Not very well. The pinch will come as to what you're going to do about Laird. According to my private information, he's coming back at The Patriot."

"For my editorials on the Combined franchise?"

"Hardly. He's too straight to resent honest criticism. No; for some of the crooked stuff that we're running in our political news. Besides, some suspicious and informed soul in the administration has read between our political lines, and got a peep of the aspiring Tertius girding himself for contest. Result, the city advertising is to be taken from The Patriot."

It needed no more than a mechanical reckoning of percentages to tell Banneker that this implied a serious diminution of his own income. Further, such a procedure would be in effect a repudiation of The Patriot and its editorial support.

"That's a rotten deal!" he exclaimed.

"No. Just politics. Justifiable, too, I should say, as politics go. I doubt whether Laird would do it of his own motion; he plays a higher game than that. But it isn't strictly within his province either to effect or prevent. Anyhow, it's going to be done."

"If he wants to fight us —" began Banneker with gloom in his eyes.

"He doesn't want to fight anybody," cut in the expert. "He wants to be mayor and run the city for what seems to him the city's best good. If he thought Marrineal would carry on his work as mayor, I doubt if he'd oppose him. But our shrewd old friend, Enderby, isn't of that mind. Enderby understands Marrineal. He'll fight to the finish."

Edmonds left his friend in a glum perturbation of mind. Enderby understood Marrineal, did he? Banneker wished that he himself did. If he could have come to grips with his employer, he would at least have known now where to take his stand. But Marrineal was elusive. No, not even elusive; quiescent. He waited.

As time passed, Banneker's editorial and personal involvements grew more complex. At what moment might a pressure from above close down on his pen, and with what demand? How should he act in the crisis thus forced, at Marrineal's slow pleasure? Take Edmonds's Gordian recourse; resign? But he was on the verge of debt. His investments had gone badly; he prided himself on the thought that it was partly through his own immovable uprightness. Now, this threat to his badly needed percent-

ages! Surely The Patriot ought to be making a greater profit than it showed, on its steadily waxing circulation. Why had he ever let himself be wrenched from his first and impregnable system of a straight payment on increase of circulation? Would it be possible to force Marrineal back into that agreement? No income was too great, surely, to recompense for such trouble of soul as The Patriot inflicted upon its editorial mouthpiece.... Through the murk of thoughts shot, golden-rayed, the vision of Io.

No world could be other than glorious in which she lived and loved him and was his.

## Chapter XI

Sheltered beneath the powerful pen of Banneker, his idyll, fulfilled, lengthened out over radiant months. Io was to him all that dreams had ever promised or portrayed. Their association, flowering to the full amidst the rush and turmoil of the city, was the antithesis to its budding in the desert peace. To see the more of his mistress, Banneker became an active participant in that class of social functions which get themselves chronicled in the papers. Wise in her day and her protective instinct of love, Io pointed out that the more he was identified with her set, the less occasion would there be for comment upon their being seen together. And they were seen together much.

She lunched with him at his downtown club, dined with him at Sherry's, met him at The Retreat and was driven back home in his car, sometimes with Archie Densmore for a third, not infrequently alone. Considerate hostesses seated them next each other at dinners: it was deemed an evidence of being "in the know" thus to accommodate them. The openness of their intimacy went far to rob calumny of its sting. And Banneker's ingrained circumspection of the man trained in the open, applied to *les convenances*, was a protection in itself. Moreover, there was in his devotion, conspicuous though it was, an air of chivalry, a breath of fragrance from a world of higher romance, which rendered women in particular charitable of judgment toward the pair.

Sometimes in the late afternoon Banneker's private numbered telephone rang, and an impersonal voice delivered a formal message. And that evening Banneker (called out of town, no matter how pressing an engagement he might have had) sat in The House With Three Eyes, now darkened of vision, thrilling and longing for her step in the dim side passage. There was risk of disaster. But Io willed to take it; was proud to take it for her lover.

Immersed in a happiness and a hope which vivified every motion of his life, Banneker was nevertheless under a continuous

strain of watchfulness; the *qui vive* of the knight who guards his lady with leveled lance from a never-ceasing threat. At the point of his weapon cowered and crouched the dragon of The Search-light, with envenomed fangs of scandal.

As the months rounded out to a year, he grew, not less careful, indeed, but more confident. Eyre had quietly dropped out of the world. Hunting big game in some wild corner of Nowhere, said rumor.

Io had revealed to Banneker the truth; her husband was in a sanitarium not far from Philadelphia. As she told him, her eyes were dim. Swift, with the apprehension of the lover to read the loved one's face, she saw a smothered jealousy in his.

"Ah, but you must pity him, too! He has been so game."

"Has been?"

"Yes. This is nearly the end. I shall go down there to be near him."

"It's a long way, Philadelphia," he said moodily.

"What a child! Two hours in your car from The Retreat."

"Then I may come down?"

"May? You must!"

He was still unappeased. "But you'll be very far away from me most of the time."

She gleamed on him, her face all joyous for his incessant want of her. "Stupid! We shall see almost as much of each other as before. I'll be coming over to New York two or three times a week."

Wherewith, and a promised daily telephone call, he must be content.

Not at that meeting did he broach the subject nearest his heart. He felt that he must give Io time to adjust herself to the new-developed status of her husband, as of one already passed out of the world. A fortnight later he spoke out. He had gone down to The Retreat for the week-end and she had come up from Philadelphia to meet him, for dinner. He found her in a secluded alcove off the main dining-porch, alone. She rose and came to him, after that one swift, sweet, precautionary glance about her with which a woman in love assures herself of safety before she

gives her lips; tender and passionate to the yearning need of her that sprang in his face.

"Ban, I've been undergoing a solemn preachment."

"From whom?"

"Archie."

"Is Densmore here?"

"No; he came over to Philadelphia to deliver it."

"About us?"

She nodded. "Don't take it so gloomily. It was to be expected."

He frowned. "It's on my mind all the time; the danger to you."

"Would you end it?" she said softly.

"Yes."

Too confident to misconstrue his reply, she let her hand fall on his, waiting.

"Io, how long will it be, with Eyre? Before —"

"Oh; that!" The brilliance faded from her eager loveliness. "I don't know. Perhaps a year. He suffers abominably, poor fellow."

"And after — after *that*, how long before you can marry me?"

She twinkled at him mischievously. "So, after all these years, my lover makes me an offer of marriage. Why didn't you ask me at Manzanita?"

"Good God! Would it possibly —"

"No; no! I shouldn't have said it. I was teasing."

"You know that there's never been a moment when the one thing worth living and fighting and striving for wasn't you."

"And success?" she taunted, but with tenderness.

"Another name for you. I wanted it only as the reflex of your wish for me."

"Even when I'd left you?"

"Even when you'd left me."

"Poor Ban!" she breathed, and for a moment her fingers fluttered at his cheek. "Have I made it up to you?"

He bent over the long, low chair in which she half reclined. "A thousand times! Every day that I see you; every day that

I think of you; with the lightest touch of your hand; the sound of your voice; the turn of your face toward me. I'm jealous of it and fearful of it. Can you wonder that I live in a torment of dread lest something happen to bring it all to ruin?"

She shook her head. "Nothing could. Unless — No. I won't say it. I want you to want to marry me, Ban. But — I wonder."

As they talked, the little light of late afternoon had dwindled, until in their nook they could see each other only as vague forms.

"Isn't there a table-lamp there?" she asked. "Turn it on."

He found and pulled the chain. The glow, softly shaded, irradiated Io's lineaments, showing her thoughtful, somber, even a little apprehensive. She lifted the shade and turned it to throw the direct rays upon Banneker. He blinked.

"Do you mind?" she asked softly. Even more softly, she added, "Do you remember?"

His mind veered back across the years, full of struggle, of triumph, of emptiness, of fulfillment, to a night in another world; a world of dreams, magic associations, high and peaceful ambitions, into which had broken a voice and an appeal from the darkness. He had turned the light upon himself then that she might see him for what he was and have no fear. So he held it now, lifting it above his forehead. Hypnotized by the compulsion of memory, she said, as she had said to the unknown helper in the desert shack:

"I don't know you. Do I?"

"Io!"

"Ah! I didn't mean to say that. It came back to me, Ban. Perhaps it's true. *Do* I know you?"

As in the long ago he answered her: "Are you afraid of me?"

"Of everything. Of the future. Of what I don't know in you."

"There's nothing of me that you don't know," he averred.

"Isn't there?" She was infinitely wistful; avid of reassurance. Before he could answer she continued: "That night in the rain when I first saw you, under the flash, as I see you now — Ban, dear, how little you've changed, how wonderfully little, to the eye! — the instant I saw you, I trusted you."

"Do you trust me now?" he asked for the delight of hearing her declare it.

Instead he heard, incredulously, the doubt in her tone. "Do I? I want to — so much! I did then. At first sight."

He set down the lamp. She could hear him breathing quick and stressfully. He did not speak.

"At first sight," she repeated. "And — I think — I loved you from that minute. Though of course I didn't know. Not for days. Then, when I'd gone, I found what I'd never dreamed of; how much I could love."

"And now?" he whispered.

"Ah, more than then!" The low cry leapt from her lips. "A thousand times more."

"But you don't trust me?"

"Why don't I, Ban?" she pleaded. "What have you done? How have you changed?"

He shook his head. "Yet you've given me your love. Do you trust yourself?"

"Yes," she answered with a startling quietude of certainty. "In that I do. Absolutely."

"Then I'll chance the rest. You're upset to-night, aren't you, so? You've let your imagination run away with you."

"This isn't a new thing to me. It began — I don't know when it began. Yes; I do. Before I ever knew or thought of you. Oh, long before! When I was no more than a baby."

"Rede me your riddle, love," he said lightly.

"It's so silly. You mustn't laugh; no, you wouldn't laugh. But you mustn't be angry with me for being a fool. Childhood impressions are terribly lasting things, Ban.... Yes, I'm going to tell you. It was a nurse I had when I was only four, I think; such a pretty, dainty Irish creature, the pink-and-black type. She used to cry over me and say — I don't suppose she thought I would ever understand or remember — 'Beware the brown-eyed boys, darlin'. False an' foul they are, the brown ones. They take a girl's poor heart an' witch it away an' twitch it away, an' toss it back all crushed an' spoilt.' Then she would hug me and sob. She left soon after; but the warning has haunted me

like a superstition.... Could you kiss it away, Ban? Tell me I'm a little fool!"

Approaching footsteps broke in upon them. The square bulk of Jim Maitland appeared in the doorway.

"What ho! you two. Ban, you're scampin' your polo practice shamefully. You'll be crabbin' the team if you don't look out. Dinin' here?"

"Yes," said Io. "Is Marie down?"

"Comin' presently. How about a couple of rubbers after dinner?"

To assent seemed the part of tact. Io and Ban went to their corner table, reserved for three, the third, Archie Densmore, being a prudent fiction. People drifted over to them, chatted awhile, were carried on and away by uncharted but normal social currents. It was a tribute to the accepted status between them that no one settled into the third chair. The Retreat is the dwelling-place of tact. All the conversationalists having come and gone, Io reverted over the coffee to the talk of their hearts.

"I can't expect you to understand me, can I? Especially as I don't understand myself. Don't sulk, Ban, dearest. You're so un-pretty when you pout."

He refused to accept the change to a lighter tone. "I understand this, Io; that you have begun unaccountably to mistrust me. That hurts."

"I don't want to hurt you. I'd rather hurt myself; a thousand times rather. Oh, I will marry you, of course, when the time comes! And yet —"

"Yet?"

"Isn't it strange, that deep-seated misgiving! I suppose it's my woman's dread of any change. It's been so perfect between us, Ban." Her speech dropped to its lowest breath of pure music:

> "'This test for love: — in every kiss, sealed fast
> To feel the first kiss and forebode the last'—

So it has been with us; hasn't it, my lover?"

"So it shall always be," he answered, low and deep.

Her eyes dreamed. "How could any man feel what he put in those lines?" she murmured.

"Some woman taught him," said Banneker.

She threw him a fairy kiss. "Why haven't we 'The Voices' here! You should read to me.... Do you ever wish we were back in the desert?"

"We shall be, some day."

She shuddered a little, involuntarily. "There's a sense of recall, isn't there! Do you still love it?"

"It's the beginning of the Road to Happiness," he said. "The place where I first saw you."

"You don't care for many things, though, Ban."

"Not many. Only two, vitally. You and the paper."

She made a curious reply pregnant of meanings which were to come back upon him afterward. "I shan't be jealous of that. Not as long as you're true to it. But I don't think you care for The Patriot, for itself."

"Oh, don't I!"

"If you do, it's only because it's part of you; your voice; your power. Because it belongs to you. I wonder if you love me mostly for the same reason."

"Say, the reverse reason. Because I belong so entirely to you that nothing outside really matters except as it contributes to you. Can't you realize and believe?"

"No; I shouldn't be jealous of the paper," she mused, ignoring his appeal. Then, with a sudden transition: "I like your Russell Edmonds. Am I wrong or is there a kind of nobility of mind in him?"

"Of mind and soul. You would be the one to see it.

> '.....the nobleness that lies
> Sleeping but never dead in other men,
> Will rise in majesty to meet thine own'"—

he quoted, smiling into her eyes.

"Do you ever talk over your editorials with him?"

"Often. He's my main and only reliance, politically."

"Only politically? Does he ever comment on other editorials? The one on Harvey Wheelwright, for instance?"

Banneker was faintly surprised. "No. Why should he? Did you discuss that with him?"

"Indeed not! I wouldn't discuss that particular editorial with any one but you."

He moved uneasily. "Aren't you attaching undue importance to a very trivial subject? You know that was half a joke, anyway."

"Was it?" she murmured. "Probably I take it too seriously. But — but Harvey Wheelwright came into one of our early talks, almost our first about real things. When I began to discover you; when 'The Voices' first sang to us. And he wasn't one of the Voices, exactly, was he?"

"He? He's a bray! But neither was Sears-Roebuck one of the Voices. Yet you liked my editorial on that."

"I adored it! You believed what you were writing. So you made it beautiful."

"Nothing could make Harvey Wheelwright beautiful. But, at least, you'll admit I made him — well, appetizing." His face took on a shade. "Love's labor lost, too," he added. "We never did run the Wheelwright serial, you know."

"Why?"

"Because the infernal idiot had to go and divorce a perfectly respectable, if plain and middle-aged wife, in order to marry a quite scandalous Chicago society flapper."

"What connection has that with the serial?"

"Don't you see? Wheelwright is the arch-deacon of the eternal proprieties and pieties. Purity of morals. Hearth and home. Faithful unto death, and so on. Under that sign he conquers — a million pious and snuffy readers, per book. Well, when he gets himself spread in the Amalgamated Wire dispatches, by a quick divorce and a hair-trigger marriage, puff goes his piety — and his hold on his readers. We just quietly dropped him."

"But his serial was just as good or as bad as before, wasn't it?"

"Certainly not! Not for our purposes. He was a dead wolf with his sheep's wool all smeared and spotted. You'll never quite understand the newspaper game, I'm afraid, lady of my heart."

"How brown your eyes are, Ban!" said Io.

## Chapter XII

Politics began to bubble in The Patriot office with promise of hotter upheavals to come. The Laird administration had shown its intention of diverting city advertising, and Marrineal had countered in the news columns by several minor but not ineffective exposures of weak spots in the city government. Banneker, who had on the whole continued to support the administration in its reform plans, decided that a talk with Willis Enderby might clarify the position and accordingly made an evening appointment with him at his house. Judge Enderby opened proceedings with typical directness of attack.

"When are *you* going to turn on us, Banneker?"

"That's a cheerful question," retorted the young man good-humoredly, "considering that it is you people who have gone back on The Patriot."

"Were any pledges made on our part?" queried Enderby.

Banneker replied with some spirit: "Am I talking with counsel under retainer or with a personal friend?"

"Quite right. I apologize," said the imperturbable Enderby. "Go on."

"It isn't the money loss that counts, so much as the slap in the face to the paper. It's a direct repudiation. You must realize that."

"I'm not wholly a novice in politics."

"But I am, practically."

"Not so much that you can't see what Marrineal would be at."

"Mr. Marrineal has not confided in me."

"Nor in me," stated the lawyer grimly. "I don't need his confidence to perceive his plans."

"What do you believe them to be?"

No glimmer of a smile appeared on the visage of Judge Enderby as he countered, "Am I talking with a representative of The Patriot or —"

"All right," laughed Banneker. "*Touché!* Assume that Mar-

rineal has political ambitions. Surely that lies within the bounds of propriety."

"Depends on how he pushes them. Do you read The Patriot, Banneker?"

The editor of The Patriot smiled.

"Do you approve its methods in, let us say, the political articles?"

"I have no control over the news columns."

"Don't answer my question," said the lawyer with a fine effect of patience, long-suffering and milky-mild, "if it in any way discommodes you."

"It all comes to this," disclosed Banneker. "If the mayor turns on us, we can't lie down under the whip and we won't. We'll hit back."

"Of course."

"Editorially, I mean."

"I understand. At least the editorials will be a direct method of attack, and an honest one. I may assume that much?"

"Have you ever seen anything in the editorial columns of The Patriot that would lead you to assume otherwise?"

"Answering categorically I would have to say 'No.'

"Answer as you please."

"Then I will say," observed the other, speaking with marked deliberation, "that on one occasion I have failed to see matter which I thought might logically appear there and the absence of which afforded me food for thought. Do you know Peter McClintick?"

"Yes. Has he been talking to you about the Veridian killings?"

Enderby nodded. "One could not but contrast your silence on that subject with your eloquence against the Steel Trust persecutions, consisting, if I recall, in putting agitators in jail for six months. Quite wrongly, I concede. But hardly as bad as shooting them down as they sleep, and their families with them."

"Tell me what you would have done in my place, then." Banneker stated the case of the Veridian Mills strike simply and fairly. "Could I turn the columns of his own paper on Marrineal for what was not even his fault?"

"Impossible. Absurd, as well," acknowledged the other "Can you even criticize Marrineal?"

The jurist reared his gaunt, straight form up from his chair and walked across to the window, peering out into the darkness before he answered with a sort of restrained passion.

"God o' mercies, Banneker! Do you ask me to judge other men's acts, outside the rules of law? Haven't I enough problems in reconciling my own conscience to conserving the interests of my clients, as I must, in honor, do? No; no! Don't expect me to judge, in any matter of greater responsibilities. I'm answerable to a small handful of people. You — your Patriot is answerable to a million. Everything you print, everything you withhold, may have incalculable influence on the minds of men. You can corrupt or enlighten them with a word. Think of it! Under such a weight Atlas would be crushed. There was a time long ago — about the time when you were born — when I thought that I might be a journalist; thought it lightly. To-day, knowing what I know, I should be terrified to attempt it for a week, a day! I tell you, Banneker, one who moulds the people's beliefs ought to have the wisdom of a sage and the inspiration of a prophet and the selflessness of a martyr."

A somber depression veiled Banneker. "One must have the sense of authority, too," he said at length with an effort. "If that is undermined, you lose everything. I'll fight for that."

With an abrupt motion his host reached up and drew the window shade, as it might be to shut out a darkness too deep for human penetration.

"What does your public care about whether The Patriot loses the city advertising; or even know about it?"

"Not the public. But the other newspapers. They'll know, and they'll use it against us.... Enderby, we can beat Bob Laird for reëlection."

"If that's a threat," returned the lawyer equably, "it is made to the wrong person. I couldn't control Laird in this matter if I wanted to. He's an obstinate young mule — for which Heaven be praised!"

"No; it isn't a threat. It's a declaration of war, if you like."

"You think you can beat us? With Marrineal?"

"Mr. Marrineal isn't an avowed candidate, is he?" evaded Banneker.

"I fancy that you'll see some rapidly evolving activity in that quarter."

"Is it true that Laird has developed social tendencies, and is using the mayoralty to climb?"

"A silly story of his enemies," answered Enderby contemptuously. "Just the sort of thing that Marrineal would naturally get hold of and use. In so far as Laird has any social relations, they are and always have been with that element which your society reporters call 'the most exclusive circles,' because that is where he belongs by birth and association."

"Russell Edmonds says that social ambition is the only road on which one climbs painfully downhill."

The other paid the tribute of a controlled smile to this. "Edmonds? A Socialist. He has a gnarled mind. Good, hard-grained wood, though. I suppose no man more thoroughly hates and despises what I represent — or what he thinks I represent, the conservative force of moneyed power — than he does. Yet in any question of professional principles, I would trust him far; yes, and of professional perceptions, too, I think; which is more difficult. A crack-brained sage; but wise. Have you talked over the Laird matter with him?"

"Yes. He's for Laird."

"Stick to Edmonds, Banneker. You can't find a better guide."

There was desultory talk until the caller got up to go. As they shook hands, Enderby said:

"Has any one been tracking you lately?"

"No. Not that I've noticed."

"There was a fellow lurking suspiciously outside; heavy-set, dark clothes, soft hat. I thought that he might be watching you."

For a man of Banneker's experience of the open, to detect the cleverest of trailing was easy. Although this watcher was sly and careful in his pursuit, which took him all the way to Chelsea Village, his every move was clear to the quarry, until the door of The House With Three Eyes closed upon its owner. Banneker went

to bed very uneasy. On whose behoof was he being shadowed? Should he warn Io?... In the morning there was no trace of the man, nor, though Banneker trained every sharpened faculty to watchfulness, did he see him again.... While he was mentally engrossed in wholly alien considerations, the solution materialized out of nothing to his inner vision. It was Willis Enderby who was being watched, and, as a side issue, any caller upon him. That evening a taxi, occupied by a leisurely young man in evening clothes, drove through East 68th Street, where stood the Enderby house, dim, proud, and stiff. The taxi stopped before a mansion not far away, and the young man addressed a heavy-bodied individual who stood, with vacant face uplifted to the high moon, as if about to bay it. Said the young man:

"Mr. Ives wishes you to report to him at once."

"Huh?" ejaculated the other, lowering his gaze.

"At the usual place," pursued the young man.

"Oh! Aw-right."

His suspicions fully confirmed, Banneker drove away. It was now Ives's move, he remarked to himself, smiling. Or perhaps Marrineal's. He would wait. Within a few days he had his opportunity. Returning to his office after luncheon, he found a penciled note from Ives on his desk, notifying him that Miss Raleigh had called him on the 'phone.

Inquiring for the useful Ives, Banneker learned that he was closeted with Marrineal. Such conferences were regarded in the office as inviolable; but Banneker was in uncompromising mood. He entered with no more of preliminary than a knock. After giving his employer good-day he addressed Ives.

"I found a note from you on my desk."

"Yes. The message came half an hour ago."

"Through the office?"

"No. On your 'phone."

"How did you get into my room?"

"The door was open."

Banneker reflected. This was possible, though usually he left his door locked. He decided to accept the explanation. Later he had occasion to revise it.

"Much obliged. By the way, on whose authority did you put a shadow on Judge Enderby?"

"On mine," interposed Marrineal. "Mr. Ives has full discretion in these matters."

"But what is the idea?"

Ives delivered himself of his pet theory. "They'll all bear watching. It may come in handy some day."

"What may?"

"Anything we can get."

"What on earth could any but an insane man expect to get on Enderby?" contemptuously asked Banneker.

Shooting a covert look at his principal, Ives either received or assumed a permission. "Well, there was some kind of an old scandal, you know."

"Was there?" Banneker's voice was negligent. "That would be hard to believe."

"Hard to get hold of in any detail. I've dug some of it out through my Searchlight connection. Very useful line, that."

Ives ventured a direct look at Banneker, but diverted it from the cold stare it encountered.

"Some woman scrape," he explicated with an effort at airiness.

Banneker turned a humiliating back on him. "The Patriot is beginning to get a bad name on Park Row for this sort of thing," he informed Marrineal.

"This isn't a Patriot matter. It is private."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Banneker in disgust. "After all, it doesn't matter. You'll have your trouble for your pains," he prophesied, and returned to 'phone Betty Raleigh.

What had become of Banneker, Betty's gay and pure-toned voice demanded over the wire. Had he eschewed the theater and all its works for good?...Too busy?...Was that a reason also for eschewing his friends?...He'd never meant to do that? Let him prove it then by coming up to see her....Yes; at once. Something special to be talked over.

It was a genuine surprise to Banneker to find that he had not seen the actress for nearly two months. Certainly he had not specially missed her, yet it was keenly pleasurable to be brought

into contact again with that restless, vital, outgiving personality. She looked tired and a little dispirited and — for she was of that rare type in which weariness does not dim, but rather qualifies and differentiates its beauty — quite as lovely as he had ever seen her. The query which gave him his clue to her special and immediate interest was:

"Why is Haslett leaving The Patriot?" Haslett was the Chicago critic transplanted to take Gurney's place.

"Is he? I didn't know. You ought not to mourn his loss, Betty."

"But I do. At least, I'm afraid I'm going to. Do you know who the new critic is?"

"No. Do you? And how do you? Oh, I suppose I ought to understand that, though," he added, annoyed that so important a change should have been kept secret from him.

With characteristic directness she replied, "You mean Tertius Marrineal?"

"Naturally."

"That's all off."

"Betty! Your engagement to him?"

"So far as there ever was any."

"Is it really off? Or have you only quarreled?"

"Oh, no. I can't imagine myself quarreling with Tertius. He's too impersonal. For the same reason, and others, I can't see myself marrying him."

"But you must have considered it, for a time."

"Not very profoundly. I don't want to marry a newspaper. Particularly such a newspaper as The Patriot. For that matter, I don't want to marry anybody, and I won't!"

"That being disposed of, what's the matter with The Patriot? It's been treating you with distinguished courtesy ever since Marrineal took over charge."

"It has. That's part of his newspaperishness."

"From our review of your new play I judge that it was written by the shade of Shakespeare in collaboration with the ghost of Molière, and that your acting in it combines all the genius of Rachel, Kean, Booth, Mrs. Siddons, and the Divine Sarah."

"This is no laughing matter," she protested. "Have you seen the play?"

"No. I'll go to-night."

"Don't. It's rotten."

"Heavens!" he cried in mock dismay. "What does this mean? Our most brilliant young —"

"And I'm as bad as the play — almost. The part doesn't fit me. It's a fool part."

"Are you quarreling with The Patriot because it has tempered justice with mercy in your case?"

"Mercy? With slush. Slathering slush."

"Come to my aid, Memory! Was it not a certain Miss Raleigh who aforetime denounced the ruffian Gurney for that he vented his wit upon a play in which she appeared. And now, because —"

"Yes; it was. I've no use for the smart-aleck school of criticism. But, at least, what Gurney wrote was his own. And Haslett, even if he is an old grouch, was honest. You couldn't buy their opinions over the counter."

Banneker frowned. "I think you'd better explain, Betty."

"Do you know Gene Zucker?"

"Never heard of him."

"He's a worm. A fat, wiggly, soft worm from Boston. But he's got an idea."

"And that is?"

"I'll tell you in a moment." She leaned forward fixing him with the honest clarity of her eyes. "Ban, if I tell you that I'm really devoted to my art, that I believe in it as — as a mission, that the theater is as big a thing to me as The Patriot is to you, you won't think me an affected little prig, will you?"

"Of course not, Betty. I know you."

"Yes. I think you do. But you don't know your own paper. Zucker's big idea, which he sold to Tertius Marrineal together with his precious self, is that the dramatic critic should be the same identical person as the assistant advertising manager in charge of theater advertising, and that Zucker should be both."

"Hell!" snapped Banneker. "I beg your pardon, Betty."

"Don't. I quite agree with you. Isn't it complete and perfect? Zucker gets his percentage of the advertising revenue which he brings in from the theaters. Therefore, will he be kind to those attractions which advertise liberally? And less kind to those which fail to appreciate The Patriot as a medium? I trow that he will! Pay your dollar and get vour puff. Dramatic criticism strictly up to date."

Banneker looked at her searchingly. "Is that why you broke with Marrineal, Betty?"

"Not exactly. No. This Zucker deal came afterward. But I think I had begun to see what sort of principles Tertius represented. You and I aren't children, Ban: I can talk straight talk to you. Well, there's prostitution on the stage, of course. Not so much of it as outsiders think, but more than enough. I've kept myself free of any contact with it. That being so, I'm certainly not going to associate myself with that sort of thing in another field....Ban, I've made the management refuse Zucker admittance to the theater. And he gave the play a wonderful send-off, as you know. Of course, Tertius would have him do that."

Rising, Banneker walked over and soberly shook the girl's hand. "Betty, you're a fine and straight and big little person. I'm proud to know you. And I'm ashamed of myself that I can do nothing. Not now, anyway. Later, perhaps..."

"No; I suppose you can't," she said listlessly. "But you'll be interested in seeing how the Zucker system works out; a half-page ad. in the Sunday edition gets a special signed and illustrated feature article, a quarter-page only a column of ordinary press stuff. A full page — I don't know what he'll offer for that. An editorial by E. B. perhaps."

"Betty!"

"Forgive me, Ban. I'm sick at heart over it all. Of course, I know you wouldn't."

Going back in his car, Banneker reflected with profound distaste that the plan upon which he was hired was not essentially different from the Zucker scheme, in Marrineal's intent. He, too, was — if Marrineal's idea worked out — to draw down a per-

centage varying in direct ratio to his suppleness in accommodating his writings to "the best interests of the paper." He swore that he would see The Patriot and its proprietor eternally damned before he would again alter jot or tittle of his editorial expression with reference to any future benefit.

It did not take long for Mr. Zucker to manifest his presence to Banneker through a line asking for an interview, written in a neat, small hand upon a card reading:

*The Patriot — Special Theatrical Features*
*E. Zucker, Representative.*

Mr. Zucker, being sent for, materialized as a buoyant little person, richly ornamented with his own initials in such carefully chosen locations as his belt-buckle, his cane, and his cigarettes. He was, he explained, injecting some new and profitable novelties into the department of dramatic criticism.

"Just a moment," quoth Banneker. "I thought that Allan Haslett had come on from Chicago to be our dramatic critic."

"Oh, he and the business office didn't hit it off very well," said little Zucker carelessly.

"Oh! And do you hit it off pretty well with the business office?"

"Naturally. It was Mr. Haring brought me on here; I'm a special departmental manager in the advertising department."

"Your card would hardly give the impression. It suggests the news rather than the advertising side."

"I'm both," stated Mr. Zucker, brightly beaming. "I handle the criticism and the feature stuff on salary, and solicit the advertising, on a percentage. It works out fine."

"So one might suppose." Banneker looked at him hard. "The idea being, if I get it correctly, that a manager who gives you a good, big line of advertising can rely on considerate treatment in the dramatic column of The Patriot."

"Well, there's no bargain to that effect. That wouldn't be classy for a big paper like ours," replied the high- if somewhat naïve-minded Mr. Zucker. "Of course, the managers understand that one good turn deserves another, and I ain't the man to roast a friend that helps me out. I started the scheme in Boston and doubled the theater revenue of my paper there in a year."

"I'm immensely interested," confessed Banneker. "But what is your idea in coming to me about this?"

"Big stuff, Mr. Banneker," answered the earnest Zucker. He laid a jeweled hand upon the other's knee, and removed it because some vestige of self-protective instinct warned him that that was not the proper place for it. "You may have noticed that we've been running a lot of special theater stuff in the Sunday." Banneker nodded. "That's all per schedule, as worked out by me. An eighth of a page ad. gets an article. A quarter page ad. gets a signed special by me. Haffa page wins a grand little send-off by Bess Breezely with her own illustrations. Now, I'm figuring on full pages. If I could go to a manager and say: 'Gimme a full-page ad. for next Sunday and I'll see if I can't get Mr. Banneker to do an editorial on the show' — if I could say that, why, nothin' to it! Nothin' at-tall! Of course," he added ruminatively, "I'd have to pick the shows pretty careful."

"Perhaps you'd like to write the editorials, too," suggested Banneker with baleful mildness.

"I thought of that," admitted the other. "But I don't know as I could get the swing of your style. You certainly got a style, Mr. Banneker."

"Thank you."

"Well, what do you say?"

"Why, this. I'll look over next Sunday's advertising, particularly the large ads., and if there is a good subject in any of the shows, I'll try to do something about it."

"Fine!" enthused the unsuspecting pioneer of business-dramatic criticism. "It's a pleasure to work with a gentleman like you, Mr. Banneker."

Withdrawing, even more pleased with himself than was his wont, Mr. Zucker confided to Haring that the latter was totally mistaken in attributing a stand-offish attitude to Banneker. Why, you couldn't ask for a more reasonable man. Saw the point at once.

"Don't you go making any fool promises on the strength of what Banneker said to you," commented Haring.

With malign relish, Banneker looked up in the Sunday adver-

tising the leading theater display, went to the musical comedy there exploited, and presently devoted a column to giving it a terrific and only half-merited slashing for vapid and gratuitous indecency. The play, which had been going none too well, straightway sold out a fortnight in advance, thereby attesting the power of the press as well as the appeal of pruriency to an eager and jaded public. Zucker left a note on the editorial desk warmly thanking his confrère for this evidence of coöperation.

Life was practicing its lesser ironies upon Banneker whilst maturing its greater ones.

## Chapter XIII

In the regular course of political events, Laird was renominated on a fusion ticket. Thereupon the old ring, which had so long battened on the corruption of local government, put up a sleek and presentable figurehead. Marrineal nominated himself amidst the Homeric laughter of the professional politicians. How's he goin' to get anywhere, they demanded with great relish of the joke, when he ain't got any organization at-tall! Presently the savor oozed out of that joke. Marrineal, it appeared, did have an organization, of sorts; worse, he had gathered to him, by methods not peculiarly his own, the support of the lesser East-Side foreign language press, which may or may not have believed in his protestations of fealty to the Common People, but certainly did appreciate the liberality of his political advertising appropriation, advertising, in this sense, to be accorded its freest interpretation. Worst of all, he had Banneker.

Banneker's editorials, not upon Marrineal himself (for he was too shrewd for that), but upon the cause of which Marrineal was standard-bearer, were persuasive, ingenious, forceful, and, to the average mind, convincing. Was Banneker himself convinced? It was a question which he resolutely refused to follow to its logical conclusion. Of the justice of the creed which The Patriot upheld, he was perfectly confident. But did Marrineal represent that creed? Did he represent anything but Marrineal? Stifling his misgivings, Banneker flung himself the more determinedly into the fight. It became apparent that he was going to swing an important fraction of the labor vote, despite the opposition of such clear-eyed leaders as McClintick. To this extent he menaced the old ring rather than the forces of reform, led by Laird and managed by Enderby. On the other hand, he was drawing from Laird, in so far as he still influenced the voters who had followed The Patriot in its original support of the reform movement. That Marrineal could not be elected, both of his opponents firmly believed; and in this belief, not-

withstanding his claims of forthcoming victory, the independent candidate privately concurred. It would be enough, for the time, to defeat decisively whichever rival he turned his heaviest guns upon in the final onset; that would insure his future political prestige. Thus far, in his speeches, he had hit out impartially at both sides, denouncing the old ring for its corruption, girding at Laird as a fake reformer secretly committed to Wall Street through Judge Enderby, corporation lawyer, as intermediary.

Herein Banneker had refrained from following him. Ever the cat at the hole's mouth, the patient lurker, the hopeful waiter upon the event, the proprietor of The Patriot forbore to press his editorial chief. He still mistrusted the strength of his hold upon Banneker; feared a defiance when he could ill afford to meet it. What he most hoped was some development which would turn Banneker's heavy guns upon Laird so that, with the defeat of the fusion ticket candidate, the public would say, "The Patriot made him and The Patriot broke him."

Laird played into Marrineal's hands. Indignant at what he regarded as a desertion of principles by The Patriot, the fusion nominee, in one of his most important addresses, devoted a stinging ten minutes to a consideration of that paper, its proprietor, and its editorial writer, in its chosen rôle of "friend of labor." His text was the Veridian strike, his information the version which McClintick furnished him; he cited Banneker by name, and challenged him as a prostituted mind and a corrupted pen. Though Laird had spoken as he honestly believed, he did not have the whole story; McClintick, in his account, had ignored the important fact that Marrineal, upon being informed of conditions, had actually (no matter what his motive) remedied them. Banneker, believing that Laird was fully apprised, as he knew Enderby to be, was outraged. This alleged reformer, this purist in politics, this apostle of honor and truth, was holding him up to contumely, through half-truths, for a course which any decent man must, in conscience, have followed. He composed a seething editorial, tore it up, substituted another wherein he made reply to the charges, in a spirit of ingenuity rather than ingenuousness, for The Patriot case, while sound, was one which

could not well be thrown open to The Patriot's public; and planned vengeance when the time should come.

Io, on a brief trip from Philadelphia, lunched with him that week, and found him distrait.

"It's only politics," he said. "You're not interested in politics," and, as usual, "Let's talk about you."

She gave him that look which was like a smile deep in the shadows of her eyes. "Ban, do you know the famous saying of Terence?"

He quoted the "Homo sum." "That one?" he asked.

She nodded. "Now, hear my version: 'I am a woman; nothing that touches *my* man is alien to my interests.'"

He laughed. But there was a note of gratitude in his voice, almost humble, as he said: "You're the only woman in the world, Io, who can quote the classics and not seem a prig."

"That's because I'm beautiful," she retorted impudently. "*Tell* me I'm beautiful, Ban!"

"You're the loveliest witch in the world," he cried.

"So much for flattery. Now — politics."

He recounted the Laird charges.

"No; that wasn't fair," she agreed. "It was most unfair. But I don't believe Bob Laird knew the whole story. Did you ask him?"

"Ask him? I certainly did not. You don't understand much about politics, dearest."

"I was thinking of it from the point of view of the newspaper. If you're going to answer him in The Patriot, I should think you'd want to know just what his basis was. Besides, if he's wrong, I believe he'd take it back."

"After all the damage has been done. He won't get the chance." Banneker's jaw set firm.

"What shall you do now?"

"Wait my chance, load my pen, and shoot to kill."

"Let me see the editorial before you print it."

"All right, Miss Meddlesome. But you won't let your ideas of fair play run away with you and betray me to the enemy? You're a Laird man, aren't you?"

Her voice fell to a caressing half-note. "I'm a Banneker woman — in everything. Won't you ever remember that?"

"No. You'll never be that. You'll always be Io; yourself; remote and unattainable in the deeper sense."

"Do *you* say that?" she answered.

"Oh, don't think that I complain. You've made life a living glory for me. Yet" — his face grew wistful — "I suppose —I don't know how to say it — I'm like the shepherd in the poem,

> 'Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
> Still clutching the inviolable shade.'

Io, why do I always think in poetry, when I'm with you?"

"I want you always to," she said, which was a more than sufficient answer.

Io had been back in Philadelphia several days, and had 'phoned Banneker that she was coming over on the following Tuesday, when, having worked at the office until early evening, he ran around the corner to Katie's for dinner. At the big table "Bunny" Fitch of The Record was holding forth.

Fitch was that invaluable type of the political hack-writer, a lackey of the mind, instinctively subservient to his paper's slightest opinion, hating what it hates, loving what it loves, with the servile adherence of a mediæval churchman. As The Record was bitter upon reform, its proprietor having been sadly disillusioned in youth by a lofty but abortive experiment in perfecting human nature from which he never recovered, Bunny lost no opportunity to damn all reformers.

"Can't you imagine the dirty little snob," he was saying, as Banneker entered, "creeping and fawning and cringing for their favors? Up for membership at The Retreat. Dines with Poultney Masters, Jr., at his club. Can't you hear him running home to wifie all het up and puffed like a toad, and telling her about it?"

"Who's all this, Bunny?" inquired Banneker, who had taken in only the last few words.

"Our best little society climber, the Honorable Robert Laird," returned the speaker, and reverted to his inspirational pen-picture: "Runs home to wifie and crows, 'What do you think, my dear! Junior Masters called me 'Bob' to-day!"

In a flash, the murderous quality of the thing bit into Banneker's sensitive brain. "Junior Masters called me 'Bob' to-day." The apotheosis of snobbery! Swift and sure poison for the enemy if properly compounded with printer's ink. How pat it fitted in with the carefully fostered conception, insisted upon in every speech by Marrineal, of the mayor as a Wall Street and Fifth Avenue tool and toady!

But what exactly had Bunny Fitch said? Was he actually quoting Laird? If so, direct or from hearsay? Or was he merely paraphrasing or perhaps only characterizing? There was a dim ring in Banneker's cerebral ear of previous words, half taken in, which would indicate the latter — and ruin the deadly plan, strike the poison-dose from his hand. Should he ask Fitch? Pin him down to the details?

The character-sketcher was now upon the subject of Judge Enderby. "Sly old wolf! Wants to be senator one of these days. Or maybe governor. A 'receptive' candidate! Wah! Pulls every wire he can lay hand on, and then waits for the honor to be forced upon him. . . . Good Lord! It's eight o'clock. I'm late."

Dropping a bill on the table he hurried out. Half-minded to stop him, Banneker took a second thought. Why should he? His statement had been definite. Anyway, he could be called up on the morrow. Dining hastily and in deep, period-building thought, Banneker returned to the office, locked himself in, and with his own hand drafted the editorial built on that phrase of petty and terrific import: "Junior Masters called me 'Bob' to-day."

After it was written he would not for the world have called up Fitch to verify the central fact. He couldn't risk it. He scheduled the broadside for the second morning following. . . . But there was Io! He had promised. Well, he was to meet her at a dinner party at the Forbes's. She could see it then, if she hadn't forgotten. . . . No; that, too, was a subterfuge hope. Io never forgot.

As if to assure the resumption of their debate, the talk of the Forbes dinner table turned to the mayoralty fight. Shrewd judges of events and tendencies were there; Thatcher Forbes, himself, not the least of them; it was the express opinion that Laird stood a very good chance of victory.

"Unless they can definitely pin the Wall Street label on him," suggested some one.

"That might beat him; it's the only thing that could," another opined.

Hugging his withering phrase to his heart, Banneker felt a growing exultation.

"Nobody but The Patriot —" began Mrs. Forbes contemptuously, when she abruptly recalled who was at her table. "The newspapers are doing their worst, but I think they won't make people believe much of it," she amended.

"Is Laird really the Wall Street candidate?" inquired Esther Forbes.

Farley Welland, Io's cousin, himself an amateur politician, answered her: "He is or he isn't, according as you look at it. Masters and his crowd are mildly for him, because they haven't any objection to a decent, straight city government, at present. Sometimes they have."

"On that principle, Horace Vanney must have," remarked Jim Maitland. "He's fighting Laird, tooth and nail, and certainly he represents one phase of Wall Street activity."

"My revered uncle," drawled Herbert Cressey, "considers that the present administration is too tender of the working-man — or, rather, working-woman — when she strikes. Don't let 'em strike; or, if they do strike, have the police bat 'em on the head."

"What's this administration got to do with Vanney's mills? I thought they were in Jersey," another diner asked.

"So they are, the main ones. But he's backing some of the local clothing manufacturers, the sweat-shop lot. They've been having strikes. That interferes with profits. Uncle wants the good old days of the night-stick and the hurry-up wagon back. He's even willing to spend a little money on the good cause."

Io, seated on Banneker's left, turned to him. "Is that true, Ban?"

"I've heard rumors to that effect," he replied evasively.

"Won't it put The Patriot in a queer position, to be making common cause with an enemy of labor?"

"It isn't a question of Horace Vanney, at all," he declared. "He's just an incident."

"When are you going to write your Laird editorial?"

"All written. I've got a proof in my pocket."

She made as if to hold out her hand; but withdrew it. "After dinner," she said. "The little enclosed porch off the conservatory."

Amused and confirmatory glances followed them as they withdrew together. But there was no ill-natured commentary. So habituated was their own special set to the status between them that it was accepted with tolerance, even with the good-humored approval with which human nature regards a logical inter-attraction.

"Are you sure that you want to plunge into politics, Io?" Banneker asked, looking down at her as she seated herself in the cushioned *chaise longue*.

Her mouth smiled assent, but her eyes were intent and serious. He dropped the proof into her lap, bending over and kissing her lips as he did so. For a moment her fingers interlaced over his neck.

"I'll understand it," she breathed, interpreting into his caress a quality of pleading.

Before she had read halfway down the column, she raised to him a startled face. "Are you sure, Ban?" she interrogated.

"Read the rest," he suggested.

She complied. "What a terrible power little things have," she sighed. "That would make me despise Laird."

"A million other people will feel the same way to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Is it to be published so soon?"

"In the morning's issue."

"Ban; is it true? Did he say that?"

"I have it from a man I've known ever since I came to New York. He's reliable."

"But it's so unlike Bob Laird."

"Why is it unlike him?" he challenged with a tinge of impatience. "Hasn't he been playing about lately with the Junior Masters?"

"Do you happen to know," she replied quietly, "that Junior and Bob Laird were classmates and clubmates at college, and that they probably always have called each other by their first names?"

"No. Have you ever heard them?" Angry regret beset him the instant the question had passed his lips. If she replied in the affirmative —

"No; I've never happened to hear them," she admitted; and he breathed more freely.

"Then my evidence is certainly more direct than yours," he pointed out.

"Ban; that charge once made public is going to be unanswerable, isn't it? Just because the thing itself is so cheap and petty?"

"Yes. You've got the true journalistic sense, Io."

"Then there's the more reason why you shouldn't print it unless you know it to be true."

"But it *is* true." Almost he had persuaded himself that it was; that it must be.

"The Olneys are having the Junior Masters to dine this evening. I know because I was asked; but of course I wanted to be here, where you are. Let me call Junior on the 'phone and ask him."

Banneker flushed. "You can't do that, Io."

"Why not?"

"Why, it isn't the sort of thing that one can very well do," he said lamely.

"Not ask Junior if he and Bob Laird are old chums and call each other by their first names?"

"How silly it would sound!" He tried to laugh the proposal away. "In any case, it wouldn't be conclusive. Besides, it's too late by this time."

"Too late?"

"Yes. The forms are closed."

"You couldn't change it?"

"Why, I suppose I could, in an extreme emergency. But, dearest, it's all right. Why be so difficult?"

"It isn't playing the game, Ban."

"Indeed, it is. It's playing the game as Laird has elected to play it. Did he make inquiries before he attacked us on the Veridian strike?"

"That's true," she conceded.

"And my evidence for this is direct. You'll have to trust me and my professional judgment, Io."

She sighed, but accepted this, saying, "If he *is* that kind of a snob it ought to be published. . . . Suppose he sues for libel?"

"He'd be laughed out of court. Why, what is there libelous in saying that a man claims to have been called by his first name by another man?" Banneker chuckled.

"Well, it ought to be libelous if it isn't true," asserted Io warmly. "It isn't fair or decent that a newspaper can hold a man up as a boot-licker and toady, if he isn't one, and yet not be held responsible for it."

"Well, dearest, I didn't make the libel laws. They're hard enough as it is." His thought turned momentarily to Ely Ives, the journalistic sandbag, and he felt a momentary qualm. "I don't pretend to like everything about my job. One of these days I'll have a newspaper of my own, and you shall censor every word that goes in it."

"Help! Help!" she laughed. "I shouldn't have the time for anything else; not even for being in love with the proprietor. Ban," she added wistfully, "does it cost a very great deal to start a new paper?"

"Yes. Or to buy an old one."

"I have money of my own, you know," she ventured.

He fondled her hand. "That isn't even a temptation," he replied.

But it was. For a paper of his own was farther away from him than it had ever been. That morning he had received his statement from his broker. To date his losses on Union Thread were close to ninety thousand dollars.

Who shall measure the spreading and seeding potentialities of a thistle-down or a catchy phrase? Within twenty-four hours after the appearance of Banneker's editorial, the apocryphal boast of Mayor Laird to his wife had become current political

history. Current? Rampant, rather. Messenger boys greeted each other with "Dearie, Mr. Masters calls me Bob." Brokers on 'Change shouted across a slow day's bidding, "What's your cute little pet name? Mine's Bobbie." Huge buttons appeared with miraculous celerity in the hands of the street venders inscribed,

> Call me Bob but Vote for Marrineal

Vainly did Judge Enderby come out with a statement to the press, declaring the whole matter a cheap and nasty fabrication, and challenging The Patriot to cite its authority. The damage already done was irreparable. Sighting Banneker at luncheon a few days later, Horace Vanney went so far as to cross the room to greet and congratulate him.

"A master-stroke," he said, pressing Banneker's hand with his soft palm. "We're glad to have you with us. Won't you call me up and lunch with me soon?"

At The Retreat, after polo, that Saturday, the senior Masters met Banneker face to face in a hallway, and held him up.

"Politics is politics. Eh?" he grunted.

"It's a great game," returned the journalist.

"Think up that 'call-me-Bob' business yourself?"

"I got it from a reliable source."

"Damn lie," remarked Poultney Masters equably. "Did the work, though. Banneker, why didn't you let me know you were in the market?"

"In the stock-market? What has that —"

"*You* know what market I mean," retorted the great man with unconcealed contempt. "What you don't know is your own game. Always seek the highest bidder before you sell, my boy."

"I'll take that from no man —" began Banneker hotly.

Immediately he was sensible of a phenomenon. His angry eyes, lifted to Poultney Masters's glistening little beads, were unable to endure the vicious amusement which he read therein. For the first time in his life he was stared down. He passed on, followed by a low and scornful hoot.

Meeting Willis Enderby while charge and counter-charge still filled the air, Io put the direct query to him:

"Cousin Billy, what is the truth about the Laird-Masters story?"

"Made up out of whole cloth," responded Enderby.

"Who made it up?"

Comprehension and pity were in his intonation as he replied: "Not Banneker, I understand. It was passed on to him."

"Then you don't think him to blame?" she cried eagerly.

"I can't exculpate him as readily as that. Such a story, considering its inevitable — I may say its intended — consequences, should never have been published without the fullest investigation."

"Suppose"— she hesitated —"he had it on what he considered good authority?"

"He has never even cited his authority."

"Couldn't it have been confidential?" she pleaded.

"Io, do you know his authority? Has he told you?"

"No."

Enderby's voice was very gentle as he put his next question. "Do you trust Banneker, my dear?"

She met his regard, unflinchingly, but there was a piteous quiver about the lips which formed the answer. "I have trusted him. Absolutely."

"Ah; well! I've seen too much good and bad too inextricably mingled in human nature, to judge on part information."

Election day came and passed. On the evening of it the streets were ribald with crowds gleefully shrieking! "Call me Dennis, wifie. I'm stung!" Laird had been badly beaten, running far behind Marrineal. Halloran, the ring candidate, was elected. Banneker did it.

As he looked back on the incidents of the campaign and its culminating event with a sense of self-doubt poisoning his triumph, that which most sickened him of his own course was not the overt insult from the financial emperor, but the soft-palmed gratulation of Horace Vanney.

## Chapter XIV

Ambition is the most conservative of influences upon a radical mind. No sooner had Tertius Marrineal formulated his political hopes than there were manifested in the conduct of The Patriot strange symptoms of a hankering after respectability. Essentially Marrineal was not respectable, any more than he was radical. He was simply and singly selfish. But, having mapped out for himself a career which did not stop short of a stately and deep-porticoed edifice in Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue (for his conception of the potential leverage of a great newspaper increased with The Patriot's circulation), he deemed it advisable to moderate some of the more blatant features, on the same principle which had induced him to reform the Veridian lumber mill abuses, lest they be brought up to his political detriment later. A long-distance thinker, Tertius Marrineal.

Operating through invisible channels and by a method which neither Banneker nor Edmonds ever succeeded in fathoming, his influence now began to be felt for the better tone of the news columns. They became less glaringly sensational. Yet the quality of the news upon which the paper specialized was the same; it was the handling which was insensibly altered. That this was achieved without adversely affecting circulation was another proof, added to those already accumulated, of Marrineal's really eminent journalistic capacities. The change was the less obvious, because The Patriot's competitors in the Great Three-Ringed Circus of Sensation had found themselves being conducted, under that leadership, farther along the primrose path of stimulation and salaciousness than they had realized, and had already modified their policies.

Even under the new policy, however, The Patriot would hardly have proven, upon careful analysis, more decent or self-respecting. But it was less obvious; cleverer in avoiding the openly offensive. Capron had been curbed in his pictorial orgies. The copy-readers had been supplied with a list of words and

terms tabooed from the captions. But the influence of Severance was still potent in the make-up of the news. While Banneker was relieved at the change, he suspected its impermanency should it prove unsuccessful. To neither his chief editorial writer nor Russell Edmonds had the proprietor so much as hinted at the modification of scheme. His silence to these two was part of his developing policy of separating more widely the different departments of the paper in order that he might be the more quietly and directly authoritative over all.

The three men were lunching late at Delmonico's, and talking politics, when Edmonds leaned forward in his seat to look toward the entrance.

"There's Severance," said he. "What's the matter with him?"

The professional infuser of excitements approached walking carefully among the tables. His eyes burned in a white face.

"On one of his sprees," diagnosed Banneker. "Oh, Severance! Sit down here."

"I beg your p-p-pardon." Severance spoke with marked deliberation and delicacy, but with a faint stammer. "These not b-being office hours, I have not the p-pleasure of your acquaintance."

Marrineal smiled.

"The p-pale rictus of the damned," observed Severance. "As one damned soul to another, I c-confess a longing for companionship of m-my own sort. Therefore I accept your invitation. Waiter, a Scotch h-highball."

"We were talking of—" began Banneker, when the newcomer broke in:

"Talk of m-me. Of me and m-my work. I exult in my w-work. L-like Mr. Whitman, I celebrate myself. I p-point with pride. What think you, gentlemen, of to-day's paper in honor of which I have t-taken my few drinks?"

"If you mean the Territon story," growled Edmonds, "it's rotten."

"Precisely. I thank you for your g-golden opinion. Rotten. Exactly as intended."

"Put a woman's good name on trial and sentence it on hearsay without appeal or recourse."

"There is always the danger of going too far along those lines," pointed out Marrineal judicially.

"Pardon me, all-wise Proprietor. The d-danger lies in not going far enough. The frightful p-peril of being found dull."

"The Territon story assays too thin in facts, as we've put it out. If Mrs. Territon doesn't leave her husband now for McLaurin," opined Marrineal, "we are in a difficult position. I happen to know her and I very much doubt —'

"Doubt not at all, d-doubting Tertius. The very fact of our publishing the story will force her hand. It's an achievement, that story. No other p-paper has a line of it."

"Not more than one other would touch it, in its present form," said Banneker. "It's too raw."

"The more virtue to us. I r-regard that story as an inspiration. Nobody could have brought it off b-but me. 'A god, a god their Severance ruled,'" punned the owner of the name.

"Beelzebub, god of filth and maggots," snarled Edmonds.

"Bacchus, god of all true inspiration!" cried Severance. "Waiter, slave of B-Bacchus, where is my Scotch?"

"Severance, you're going too far along your chosen line," declared Banneker bluntly.

"Yes; we must tone down a little, agreed Marrineal.

The sensationalist lifted calmly luminous eyes to his chief. "Why?" he queried softly. "Are you meditating a change? Does the journalistic l-lady of easy virtue begin to yearn f-for the paths of respectability?"

"Steady, Severance," warned Edmonds.

At the touch of the curb the other flamed into still, white wrath. "If you're going to be a whore," he said deliberately, "play the whore's game. I'm one and I know it. Banneker's one, but hasn't the courage to face it. You're one, Edmonds — no, you're not; not even that. You're the hallboy that f-fetches the drinks —"

Marrineal had risen. Severance turned upon him.

"I salute you, Madam of our high-class establishment. When

you take your p-price, you at east look the business in the face. No illusions for M-Madam Marrineal.... By the w-way, I resign from the house."

"Are you coming, Mr. Edmonds?" said Marrineal. "You'll sign the check for me, will you, Mr. Banneker?"

Left alone with the disciple of Bacchus and Beelzebub, the editor said:

"Better get home, Severance. Come in to-morrow, will you?"

"No. I'm q-quite in earnest about resigning. No further use for the damned j-job now."

"I never could see why you had any use for it in the first place. Was it money?"

"Of course."

"Oh, I see."

"You d-don't see at all. I wanted the m-money for a purpose. The purpose was a woman. I w-wanted to keep pace with her and her s-set. It was the set to which I rightly belonged, but I'd dropped out. I thought I p-preferred drink. I didn't after she got hold of me. I d-don't know why the d-devil I'm telling you all this."

"I'm sorry, Severance," said Banneker honestly.

The other raised his glass. "Here's to her," he said. He drank. "I wish her nothing w-worse than she's got. Her name is —"

"Wait a moment, Severance," cut in Banneker sharply. "Don't say anything that you'll regret. Naming of names —"

"Oh, there's no harm in this, n-now," said Severance wearily. "Hers is smeared in filth all over our third page. It is Maud Territon. What do you think of P-Patriotic journalism, anyway, Banneker?"

## Chapter XV

With the accession to political control of Halloran and the old ring, the influence of Horace Vanney and those whom he represented, became as potent as it was secret. "Salutary measures" had been adopted toward the garment-workers; a "firm hand" on the part of the police had succeeded in holding down the strike through the fall and winter; but in the early spring it was revived and spread throughout the city, even to the doors of the shopping district. In another sense than the geographical it was nearing the great department stores, for quiet efforts were being made by some of the strike leaders to organize and unionize the underpaid salesmen and saleswomen of the shops. Inevitably this drew into active hostility to the strikers the whole power of the stores with their immense advertising influence.

Very little news of the strike got into the papers except where some clash with the police was of too great magnitude to be ignored; then the trend of the articles was generally hostile to the strikers. The Sphere published the facts briefly, as a matter of journalistic principle; The Ledger published them with violent bias, as a matter of journalistic habit; the other papers, including The Patriot, suppressed or minimized to as great an extent as they deemed feasible.

That the troubles of some thousands of sweated wage-earners, employed upon classes of machine-made clothing which would never come within the ken of the delicately clad women of her world, could in any manner affect Io Eyre, was most improbable. But the minor fate who manipulates improbabilities elected that she should be in a downtown store at the moment when a squad of mounted police charged a crowd of girl-strikers. Hearing the scream of panic, she ran out, saw ignorant, wild-eyed girls, hardly more than children, beaten down, trampled, hurried hither and thither, seized upon and thrown into patrol wagons, and when she reached her car, sick and furious, found an eighteen-year-old Lithuanian blonde flopping against the rear fender in a dead

faint. Strong as a young panther, Io picked up the derelict in her arms, hoisted her into the tonneau, and bade the disgusted chauffeur, "Home." What she heard from the revived girl, in the talk which followed, sent her, hot-hearted, to the police court where the arrests would be brought up for primary judgment.

The first person that she met there was Willis Enderby.

"If you're on this strike case, Cousin Billy," she said, "I'm against you, and I'm ashamed of you."

"You probably aren't the former, and you needn't be the latter," he replied.

"Aren't you Mr. Vanney's lawyer? And isn't he interested in the strike?"

"Not openly. It happens that I'm here for the strikers."

Io stared, incredulous. "For the strikers? You mean that they've retained you?"

"Oh, no. I'm really here in my capacity as President of the Law Enforcement Society; to see that these women get the full protection of the law, to which they are entitled. There is reason to believe that they haven't had it. And you?"

Io told him.

"Are you willing to go on the stand?"

"Certainly; if it will do any good."

"Not much, so far as the case goes. But it will force it into the newspapers. 'Society Leader Takes Part of Working-Girls,' and so-on. The publicity will be useful."

The magistrate on the bench was lenient; dismissed most of the prisoners with a warning against picketing; fined a few; sent two to jail. He seemed surprised and not a little impressed by the distinguished Mrs. Delavan Eyre's appearance in the proceedings, and sent word out to the reporters' room, thereby breaking up a game of pinochle at its point of highest interest. There was a man there from The Patriot.

With eager expectation Io, back in her Philadelphia apartment, sent out for a copy of the New York Patriot. Greatly to her disgust she found herself headlined, half-toned, described; but with very little about the occasion of her testimony, a mere

mention of the strike and nothing whatsoever regarding the police brutalities which had so stirred her wrath. Io discovered that she had lost her taste for publicity, in a greater interest. Her first thought was to write Banneker indignantly; her second to ask explanations when he called her on the 'phone as he now did every noon; her third to let the matter stand until she went to New York and saw him. On her arrival, several days later, she went direct to his office. Banneker's chief interest, next to his ever-thrilling delight in seeing her, was in the part played by Willis Enderby.

"What is he doing in that galley?" he wondered.

To her explanation he shook his head. Something more than that, he was sure. Asking Io's permission he sent for Russell Edmonds.

"Isn't this a new rôle for Enderby?" he asked.

"Not at all. He's been doing this sort of thing always. Usually on the quiet."

"The fact that this is far from being on the quiet suggests politics, doesn't it? Making up to the labor vote?"

"What on earth should Cousin Billy care for the labor vote?" demanded Io. "Mr. Laird is dead politically, isn't he?"

"But Judge Enderby isn't. Mr. Edmonds will tell you that much."

"True enough. Enderby is a man to be reckoned with. Particularly if — " Edmonds paused, hesitant.

"If — " prompted Banneker. "Fire ahead, Pop."

"If Marrineal should declare in on the race for the governorship, next fall."

"Without any state organization? Is that probable?" asked Banneker.

"Only in case he should make a combination with the old ring crowd, who are, naturally, grateful for his aid in putting over Halloran for them. It's quite within the possibilities."

"After the way The Patriot and Mr. Marrineal himself have flayed the ring?" exclaimed Io. "It isn't possible. How could he so go back on himself?"

Edmonds turned his fine and serious smile upon her. "Mr.

Marrineal's guiding principle of politics *and* journalism is that the public never remembers. If he persuades the ring to nominate him, Enderby is the logical candidate against him. In my belief he's the only man who could beat him."

"Do you really think, Mr. Edmonds, that Judge Enderby's help to the arrested women is a political move?"

"That's the way it would be interpreted by all the politicians. Personally, I don't believe it."

"His sympathies, professional and personal, are naturally on the other side," pointed out Banneker.

"But not yours, surely Ban!" cried Io. "Yours ought to be with them. If you could have seen them as I did, helpless and panic-stricken, with the horses pressing in on them —"

"Of course I'm with them," warmly retorted Banneker. "If I controlled the news columns of the paper, I'd make another Sippiac Mills story of this." No sooner had he said it than he foresaw to what reply he had inevitably laid himself open. It came from Io's lips.

"You control the editorial column, Ban."

"It's a subject to be handled in the news, not the editorials," he said hastily.

The silence that fell was presently relieved by Edmonds. "It's also being handled in the advertising columns. Have you seen the series of announcements by the Garment Manufacturers' Association? There are four of 'em now in proof."

"No. I haven't seen them," answered Banneker.

"They're able. But on the whole they aren't as able as the strikers' declaration in rebuttal, offered us to-day, one-third of a page at regular advertising rates, same as the manufacturers'."

"Enderby?" queried Banneker quickly.

"I seem to detect his fine legal hand in it."

Banneker's face became moody. "I suppose Haring refused to publish it."

"No. Haring's for taking it."

"How is that?" said the editor, astonished. "I thought Haring —"

"You think of Haring as if Haring thought as you and I think.

That isn't fair," declared Edmonds. "Haring's got a business mind, straight within its limitations. He accepts this strike stuff just as he accepts blue-sky mine fakes and cancer cures in which he has no belief, because he considers that a newspaper is justified in taking any ad. that is offered — and let the reader beware. Besides, it goes against his grain to turn down real money."

"Will it appear in to-morrow's paper?" questioned Io.

"Probably, if it appears at all."

"Why the 'if'?" said Banneker. "Since Haring has passed it — "

"There is also Marrineal."

"Haring sent it to him?"

"Not at all. The useful and ubiquitous Ives, snooping as usual, came upon it. Hence it is now in Marrineal's hands. Likely to remain there, I should think."

"Mr. Marrineal won't let it be published?" asked Io.

"That's my guess," returned the veteran.

"And mine," added Banneker.

He felt her eyes of mute appeal fixed on him and read her meaning.

"All right, Io," he promised quietly. "If Mr. Marrineal won't print it in advertising, I'll print it as editorial."

"When?" Io and Edmonds spoke in one breath.

"Day after to-morrow."

"That's war," said Edmonds.

"In a good cause," declared Io proudly.

"The cause of the independence of Errol Banneker," said the veteran. "It was bound to come. Go in and win, son. I'll get you a proof of the ad."

"Ban!" said Io with brightened regard.

"Well?"

"Will you put something at the head of your column for me, if that editorial appears?"

"What? Wait! I know. The quotation from the Areopagitica. Is that it?"

"Yes."

"Fine! I'll do it."

On the following morning The Patriot appeared as usual. The first of the Manufacturers' Association arguments to the public was conspicuously displayed. Of the strikers' reply — not a syllable. Banneker went to Haring's office; found the business manager gloomy, but resigned.

"Mr. Marrineal turned it down. He's got the right. That's all there is to it," was his version.

"Not quite," remarked Banneker, and went home to prove it.

Into the editorial which was to constitute the declaration of Errol Banneker's independence went much thinking, and little writing. The pronunciamento of the strikers, prefaced by a few words of explanation, and followed by some ringing sentences as to the universal right to a fair field, was enough. At the top of the column the words of Milton, in small, bold print. Across the completed copy he wrote "Thursday. Must."

Never had Banneker felt in finer fettle for war than when he awoke that Thursday morning. Contrary to his usual custom, he did not even look at the copy of The Patriot brought to his breakfast table; he wanted to have that editorial fresh to eye and mind when Marrineal called him to account for it. For this was a challenge which Marrineal could not ignore. He breakfasted with a copy of "The Undying Voices" propped behind his coffee cup, refreshing himself before battle with the delights of allusive memory, bringing back the days when he and Io had read and discovered together. It was noon when he reached the office.

From the boy at the entrance he learned that Mr. Marrineal had come in. Doubtless he would find a summons on his desk. None was there. Perhaps Marrineal would come to him. He waited. Nothing. Taking up the routine of the day, he turned to his proofs, with a view to laying out his schedule.

The top one was his editorial on the strikers' cause.

Across it was blue-penciled the word "Killed."

Banneker snatched up the morning's issue. The editorial was not there. In its place he read, from the top of the column: "And though all the winds of doctrine blow"— and so on, to the close of Milton's proud challenge, followed by:

"Would You Let Your Baby Drink Carbolic?"

For the strike editorial had been substituted one of Banneker's typical "mother-fetchers," as he termed them, very useful in their way, and highly approved by the local health authorities. This one was on the subject of pure milk. Its association with the excerpt from the Areopagitica (which, having been set for a standing head, was not cut out by the "Killed") set the final touch of irony upon the matter. Even in his fury Banneker laughed.

He next considered the handwriting of the blue-penciled monosyllable. It was not Marrineal's blunt, backhand script. Whose was it? Haring's? Trailing the proof in his hand he went to the business manager's room.

"Did you kill this?"

"Yes." Haring got to his feet, white and shaking. "For God's sake, Mr. Banneker —"

"I'm not going to hurt you — yet. By what right did you do it?"

"Orders."

"Marrineal's?"

"Yes."

With no further word, Banneker strode to the owner's office, pushed open the door, and entered. Marrineal looked up, slightly frowning.

"Did you kill this editorial?"

Marrineal's frown changed to a smile. "Sit down, Mr. Banneker."

"Marrineal, did you kill my editorial?"

"Isn't your tone a trifle peremptory, for an employee?"

"It won't take more than five seconds for me to cease to be an employee," said Banneker grimly.

"Ah? I trust you're not thinking of resigning. By the way, some reporter called on me last week to confirm a rumor that you were about to resign. Let me see; what paper? Ah; yes; it wasn't a newspaper, at least, not exactly. The Searchlight. I told her — it happened to be a woman — that the story was quite absurd."

Something in the nature of a cold trickle seemed to be flow-

ing between Banneker's brain and his tongue. He said with effort,

"Will you be good enough to answer my question?"

"Certainly. Mr. Banneker, that was an ill-advised editorial. Or, rather, an ill-timed one. I didn't wish it published until we had time to talk it over."

"We could have talked it over yesterday."

"But I understood that you were busy with callers yesterday. That charming Mrs. Eyre, who, by the way, is interested in the strikers, isn't she? Or was it the day before yesterday that she was here?"

The Searchlight! And now Io Eyre! No doubt of what Marrineal meant. The cold trickle had passed down Banneker's spine, and settled at his knees making them quite unreliable. Inexplicably it still remained to paralyze his tongue.

"We're reasonable men, you and I, Mr. Banneker," pursued Marrineal in his quiet, detached tones. "This is the first time I have ever interfered. You must do me the justice to admit that. Probably it will be the last. But in this case it was really necessary. Shall we talk it over later?"

"Yes," said Banneker listlessly.

In the hallway he ran into somebody, who cursed him, and then said, oh, he hadn't noticed who it was; Pop Edmonds. Edmonds disappeared into Marrineal's office. Banneker regained his desk and sat staring at the killed proof. He thought vaguely that he could appreciate the sensation of a man caught by an octopus. Yet Marrineal didn't look like an octopus.... What did he look like? What was that subtle resemblance which had eluded him in the first days of their acquaintanceship? That emanation of chill quietude; those stagnant eyes?

He had it now! It dated back to his boyhood days. A crawling terror which, having escaped from a menagerie, had taken refuge in a pool, and there fixed its grip upon an unfortunate calf, and dragged — dragged — dragged the shrieking creature, until it went under. A crocodile.

His reverie was broken by the irruption of Russell Edmonds.

An inch of the stem of the veteran's dainty little pipe was clenched firmly between his teeth; but there was no bowl.

"Where's the rest of your pipe?" asked Banneker, stupefied by this phenomenon.

"I've resigned," said Edmonds.

"God! I wish I could," muttered Banneker.

## Chapter XVI

Explanations were now due to two people, Io and Willis Enderby. As to Io, Banneker felt an inner conviction of strength. Hopeless though he was of making his course appear in any other light than that of surrender, nevertheless he could tell himself that it was really done for her, to protect her name. But he could not tell her this. He knew too well what the answer of that high and proud spirit of hers would be; that if their anomalous relationship was hampering his freedom, dividing his conscience, the only course of honor was for them to stop seeing each other at no matter what cost of suffering; let Banneker resign, if that were his rightful course, and tell The Searchlight to do its worst. Yes; such would be Io's idea of playing the game. He could not force it. He must argue with her, if at all, on the plea of expediency. And to her forthright and uncompromising fearlessness, expediency was in itself the poorest of expedients. At the last, there was her love for him to appeal to. But would Io love where she could not trust?...He turned from that thought.

As an alternative subject for consideration, Willis Enderby was hardly more assuring and even more perplexing. True, Banneker owed no explanation to him; but for his own satisfaction of mind he must have it out with the lawyer. He had a profound admiration for Enderby and knew that this was in a measure reciprocated by a patent and almost wistful liking, curious in a person as reserved as Enderby. He cherished a vague impression that somehow Enderby would understand. Or, at least, that he would want to understand. Consequently he was not surprised when the lawyer called him up and asked him to come that evening to the Enderby house. He went at once to the point.

"Banneker, do you know anything of an advertisement by the striking garment-workers, which The Patriot first accepted and afterward refused to print?"

"Yes."

"Are you at liberty to tell me why?"

"In confidence."

"That is implied."

"Mr. Marrineal ordered it killed."

"Ah! It was Marrineal himself. The advocate of the Common People! The friend of Labor!"

"Admirable campaign material," observed Banneker composedly, "if it were possible to use it."

"Which, of course, it isn't; being confidential," Enderby capped the thought. "I hear that Russell Edmonds has resigned."

"That is true."

"In consequence of the rejected advertisement?"

Banneker sat silent so long that his host began: "Perhaps I shouldn't have asked that —"

"I'm going to tell you exactly what occurred," said Banneker quietly, and outlined the episode of the editorial, suppressing, however, Marrineal's covert threat as to Io and The Searchlight. "And *I* haven't resigned. So you see what manner of man I am," he concluded defiantly.

"You mean a coward? I don't think it."

"I wish I were sure!" burst out Banneker.

"Ah? That's hard, when the soul doesn't know itself.... Is it money?" The crisp, clear voice had softened to a great kindliness. "Are you in debt, my boy?"

"No. Yes; I am. I'd forgotten. That doesn't matter."

"Apparently not." The lawyer's heavy brows went up. "More serious than money," he commented.

Banneker recognized the light of suspicion, comprehension, confirmation in the keen and fine visage turned upon him. Enderby continued:

"Well, there are matters that can be talked of and other matters that can't be talked of. But if you ever feel that you want the advice of a man who has seen human nature on a good many sides, and has learned not to judge too harshly of it, come to me. The only counsel I ever give gratis to those who can pay for it"— he smiled faintly — "is the kind that may be too valuable to sell."

"But I'd like to know," said Banneker slowly, "why you don't think me a yellow dog for not resigning."

"Because, in your heart you don't think yourself one. Speaking of that interesting species, I suppose you know that your principal is working for the governorship."

"Will he get the nomination?"

"Quite possibly. Unless I can beat him for it. I'll tell you privately I may be the opposing candidate. Not that the party loves me any too much; but I'm at least respectable, fairly strong up-State, and they'll take what they have to in order to beat Marrineal, who is forcing himself down their throats."

"A pleasant prospect for me," gloomed Banneker. "I'll have to fight you."

"Go ahead and fight," returned the other heartily. "It won't be the first time."

"At least, I want you to know that it'll be fair fight."

"No 'Junior-called-me-Bob' trick this time?" smiled Enderby.

Banneker flushed and winced. "No," he answered. "Next time I'll be sure of my facts. Good-night and good luck. I hope you beat us."

As he turned the corner into Fifth Avenue a thought struck him. He made the round of the block, came up the side of the street opposite, and met a stroller having all the ear-marks of the private detective. To think of a man of Judge Enderby's character being continuously "spotted" for the mean design of an Ely Ives filled Banneker with a sick fury. His first thought was to return and tell Enderby. But to what purpose? After all, what possible harm could Ives's plotting and sneaking do to a man of the lawyer's rectitude? Banneker returned to The House With Three Eyes and his unceasing work.

The interview with Enderby had lightened his spirit. The older man's candor, his tolerance, his clear charity of judgment, his sympathetic comprehension were soothing and reassuring. But there was another trouble yet to be faced. It was three days since the editorial appeared and he had heard no word from Io. Each noon when he called on the long-distance 'phone, she had been out, an unprecedented change from her eager waiting to

hear the daily voice on the wire. Should he write? No; it was too difficult and dangerous for that. He must talk it out with her, face to face, when the time came.

Meantime there was Russell Edmonds. He found the veteran cleaning out his desk preparatory to departure.

"You can't know how it hurts to see you go, Pop," he said sadly. "What's your next step?"

"The Sphere. They want me to do a special series, out around the country."

"Aren't they pretty conservative for your ideas?"

Edmonds, ruminating over a pipe even smaller and more fragile than the one sacrificed to his rage and disgust, the day of his resignation, gave utterance to a profound truth:

"What's the difference whether a newspaper is radical or conservative, Ban, if it tells the truth? That's the whole test and touchstone; to give news honestly. The rest will take care of itself. Compared to us The Sphere crowd are conservative. But they're honest. And they're not afraid."

"Yes. They're honest, and not afraid — because they don't have to be," said Banneker, in a tone so somber that his friend said quickly:

"I didn't mean that for you, son."

"Well, if I've gone wrong, I've got my punishment before me," pursued the other with increased gloom. "Having to work for Marrineal and further his plans, after knowing him as I know him now — that's a refined species of retribution, Pop."

"I know; I know. You've got to stick and wait your chance, and hold your following until you can get your own newspaper. Then," said Russell Edmonds with the glory of an inspired vision shining in his weary eyes, "you can tell 'em all to go to hell. Oh, for a paper of our own kind that's really independent; that don't care a hoot for anything except to get the news and get it straight, and interpret it straight; that don't have to be afraid of anything but not being honest!"

"Pop," said Banneker, spiritlessly, "what's the use? How do we know we aren't chasing a rainbow? How do we know people *want* an honest paper or would know one if they saw it?"

"My God, son! Don't talk like that," implored the veteran. "That's the one heresy for which men in our game are eternally damned — and deserve it."

"All right. I know it. I don't mean it, Pop. I'm not adopting Marrineal's creed. Not just yet."

"By the way, Marrineal was asking for you this morning."

"Was he? I'll look him up. Perhaps he's going to fire me. I wish he would."

"Catch him!" grunted the other, reverting to his task. "More likely going to raise your salary."

As between the two surmises, Edmonds's was the nearer the truth. Urbane as always, the proprietor of The Patriot waved his editor to a seat, remarking, "I hope you'll sit down this time," the slightly ironical tinge to the final words being, in the course of the interview, his only reference to their previous encounter. Wondering dully whether Marrineal could have any idea of the murderous hatred which he inspired, Banneker took the nearest chair and waited. After some discussion as to the policy of the paper in respect to the strike, which was on the point of settlement by compromise, Marrineal set his delicate fingers point to point and said:

"I want to talk to you about the future."

"I'm listening," returned Banneker uncompromisingly.

"Your ultimate ambition is to own and control a newspaper of your own, isn't it?"

"Why do you think that?"

Marrineal's slow, sparse smile hardly moved his lips. "It's in character that you should. What else is there for you?"

"Well?"

"Have you ever thought of The Patriot?"

Involuntarily Banneker straightened in his chair. "Is The Patriot in the market?"

"Hardly. That isn't what I have in mind"

"Will you kindly be more explicit?"

"Mr. Banneker, I intend to be the next governor of this State."

"I might quote a proverb on that point," returned the editor unpleasantly.

"Yes; and I might cap your cup-and-lip proverb with another as to the effect of money as a stimulus in a horse-race."

"I have no doubts as to your financial capacity."

"My organization is building up through the State. I've got the country newspapers in a friendly, not to say expectant, mood. There's just one man I'm afraid of."

"Judge Enderby?"

"Exactly."

"I should think he would be an admirable nominee."

"As an individual you are at liberty to hold such opinions as you please. As editor of The Patriot —"

"I am to support The Patriot candidate and owner. Did you send for me to tell me that, Mr. Marrineal? I'm not altogether an idiot, please remember."

"You are a friend of Judge Enderby."

"If I am, that is a personal, not a political matter. No matter how much I might prefer to see him the candidate of the party" — Banneker spoke with cold deliberation — "I should not stultify myself or the paper by supporting him against the paper's owner."

"That is satisfactory." Marrineal swallowed the affront without a gulp. "To continue. If I am elected governor, nothing on earth can prevent my being the presidential nominee two years later."

Equally appalled and amused by the enormous egotism of the man thus suddenly revealed, Banneker studied him in silence.

"Nothing in the world," repeated the other. "I have the political game figured out to an exact science. I know how to shape my policies, how to get the money backing I need, how to handle the farmer and labor. It may be news to you to know that I now control eight of the leading farm journals of the country and half a dozen labor organs. However, this is beside the question. My point with you is this. With my election as governor, my chief interest in The Patriot ceases. The paper will have set me on the road; I'll do the rest. Reserving only the right to determine certain very broad policies, I purpose to turn over the control of The Patriot to you."

"To me!" said Banneker, thunderstruck.

"Provided I am elected governor," said Marrineal. "Which depends largely — yes, almost entirely — on the elimination of Judge Enderby."

"What are you asking me to do?" demanded Banneker, genuinely puzzled.

'Absolutely nothing. As my right-hand man on the paper, you are entitled to know my plans, particularly as they affect you. I can add that when I reach the White House"— this with sublime confidence —"the paper will be for sale and you may have the option on it."

Banneker's brain seemed filled with flashes of light, as he returned to his desk. He sat there, deep-slumped in his chair, thinking, planning, suspecting, plumbing for the depths of Marrineal's design, and above all filled with an elate ambition. Not that he believed for a moment in Marrineal's absurd and megalomaniacal visions of the presidency. But the governorship; that indeed was possible enough; and that would mean a free hand for Banneker for the term. What might he not do with The Patriot in that time!... An insistent and obtrusive disturbance to his profound cogitation troubled him. What was it that seemed to be setting forth a claim to divide his attention? Ah, the telephone. He thrust it aside, but it would not be silenced. Well...what...The discreet voice of his man said that a telegram had come for him. All right (with impatience); read it over the wire. The message, thus delivered in mechanical tones, struck from his mind the lesser considerations which a moment before had glowed with such shifting and troublous glory.

D. died this morning. Will write.

I.

## Chapter XVII

Work, incessant and of savage ardor, now filled Banneker's life. Once more he immersed himself in it as assuagement to the emptiness of long days and the yearning of longer nights. For, in the three months since Delavan Eyre's death, Banneker had seen Io but once, and then very briefly. Instead of subduing her loveliness, the mourning garb enhanced and enriched it, like a jet setting to a glowing jewel. More irresistibly than ever she was

> "..... that Lady Beauty in whose praise
> The voice and hand shake still"—

but there was something about her withdrawn, aloof of spirit, which he dared not override or even challenge. She spoke briefly of Eyre, without any pretense of great sorrow, dwelling with a kindled eye on that which she had found admirable in him; his high and steadfast courage through atrocious suffering until darkness settled down on his mind. Her own plans were definite; she was going away with the elder Mrs. Eyre to a rest resort. Of The Patriot and its progress she talked with interest, but her questions were general and did not touch upon the matter of the surrendered editorial. Was she purposely avoiding it or had it passed from her mind in the stress of more personal events? Banneker would have liked to know, but deemed it better not to ask. Once he tried to elicit from her some indication of when she would marry him; but from this decision she exhibited a covert and inexplicable shrinking. This he might attribute, if he chose, to that innate and sound formalism which would always lead her to observe the rules of the game; if from no special respect for them as such, then out of deference to the prejudices of others. Nevertheless, he experienced a gnawing uncertainty, amounting to a half-confessed dread.

Yet, at the moment of parting, she came to his arms, clung to him, gave him her lips passionately, longingly; bade him write, for his letters would be all that there was to keep life radiant for her...

Through some perverse kink in his mental processes, he found it difficult to write to Io, in the succeeding weeks and months, during which she devotedly accompanied the failing Mrs. Eyre from rest cure to sanitarium, about his work on The Patriot. That interplay of interest between them in his editorial plans and purposes, which had so stimulated and inspired him, was checked. The mutual current had ceased to flash; at least, so he felt. Had the wretched affair of his forfeited promise in the matter of the strike announcement destroyed one bond between them? Even were this true, there were other bonds, of the spirit and therefore irrefragable, to hold her to him; thus he comforted his anxious hopes.

Because their community of interest in his work had lapsed, Banneker found the savor oozing out of his toil. Monotony sang its dispiriting drone in his ears. He flung himself into polo with reawakened vim, and roused the hopes of The Retreat for the coming season, until an unlucky spill broke two ribs and dislocated a shoulder. Restless in the physical idleness of his mending days, he took to drifting about in the whirls and ripples and backwaters of the city life, out of which wanderings grew a new series of the "Vagrancies," more quaint and delicate and trenchant than the originals because done with a pen under perfected mastery, without losing anything of the earlier simplicity and sympathy. In this work, Banneker found relief; and in Io's delight in it, a reflected joy that lent fresh impetus to his special genius. The Great Gaines enthusiastically accepted the new sketches for his magazine.

Whatever ebbing of fervor from his daily task Banneker might feel, his public was conscious of no change for the worse. Letters of commendation, objection, denunciation, and hysteria, most convincing evidence of an editor's sway over the public mind, increased weekly. So, also, did the circulation of The Patriot, and its advertising revenue. Its course in the garment strike had satisfied the heavy local advertisers of its responsibility and repentance for sins past; they testified, by material support, to their appreciation. Banneker's strongly pro-labor editorials they read with the mental commentary that probably The Patriot

had to do that kind of thing to hold its circulation; but it could be depended upon to be "right" when the pinch came. Marrineal would see to that.

Since the episode of the killed proof, Marrineal had pursued a hands-off policy with regard to the editorial page. The labor editorials suited him admirably. They were daily winning back to the paper the support of Marrineal's pet "common people" who had been alienated by its course in the strike, for McClintick and other leaders had been sedulously spreading the story of the rejected strikers' advertisement. But, it appeared, Marrineal's estimate of the public's memory was correct: "They never remember." Banneker's skillful and vehement preachments against Wall Street, money domination of the masses, and the like, went far to wipe out the inherent anti-labor record of the paper and its owner. Hardly a day passed that some workingman's union or club did not pass resolutions of confidence and esteem for Tertius C. Marrineal and The Patriot. It amused Marrineal almost as much as it gratified him. As a political asset it was invaluable. His one cause of complaint against the editorial page was that it would not attack Judge Enderby, except on general political or economic principles. And the forte of The Patriot in attack did not consist in polite and amenable forensics. Its readers were accustomed to the methods of the prize-ring rather than the debating platform. However, Marrineal made up for his editorial writer's lukewarmness, by the vigor of his own attacks upon Enderby. For, by early summer, it became evident that the nomination (and probable election) lay between these two opponents. Enderby was organizing a strong campaign. So competent and unbiased an observer of political events as Russell Edmonds, now on The Sphere, believed that Marrineal would be beaten. Shrewd, notwithstanding his egotism, Marrineal entertained a growing dread of this outcome himself. Through roundabout channels, he let his chief editorial writer understand that, when the final onset was timed, The Patriot's editorial page would be expected to lead the charge with the "spear that knows no brother." Banneker would appreciate that his own interests, almost as much as his chief's, were committed to the overthrow of Willis Enderby.

It was not a happy time for the Editor of The Patriot.

Happiness promised for the near future, however. Wearied of chasing a phantom hope of health from spot to spot, the elder Mrs. Eyre had finally elected to settle down for the summer at her Westchester place. For obvious reasons, Io did not wish Banneker to come there. But she would plan to see him in town. Only, they must be very discreet; perhaps even to the extent of having a third person dine with them, her half-brother Archie, or Esther Forbes. Any one, any time, anywhere, Banneker wrote back, provided only he could see her again!

The day that she came to town, having arranged to meet Banneker for dinner with Esther, fate struck from another and unexpected quarter. Such was Banneker's appearance when he came forward to greet her that Io cried out involuntarily, asking if he were ill.

"*I*'m not," he answered briefly. Then, with a forced smile of appeal to the third member, "Do you mind, Esther, if I talk to Io on a private matter?"

"Go as near as you like," returned that understanding young person promptly. "I'm consumed with a desire to converse with Elsie Maitland, who is dining in that very farthest corner. Back in an hour."

"It's Camilla Van Arsdale," said Banneker as the girl left.

"You've heard from her?"

"From Mindle who looks after my shack there. He says she's very ill. I've got to go out there at once."

"Oh, Ban!"

"I know, dearest, and after all these endless weeks of separation. But you wouldn't have me do otherwise. Would you?"

"Of course not," she said indignantly. "When do you start?"

"At midnight."

'And your work?"

"I'll send my stuff in by wire."

"How long?"

"I can't tell until I get there."

"Ban, you mustn't go," she said with a changed tone.

"Not go? To Miss Camilla? There's nothing —"

"I'll go."

"You!"

"Why not? If she's seriously ill, she needs a woman, not a man with her."

"But — but, Io, you don't even like her."

"Heaven give you understanding, Ban," she retorted with a bewitching pretext of enforced patience. "She's a woman, and she was good to me in my trouble. And if that weren't enough, she's your friend whom you love."

"I oughtn't to let you," he hesitated.

"You've got to let me. I'd go, anyway. Get Esther back. She must help me pack. Get me a drawing-room if you can. If not, I'll take your berth."

"You're going to leave to-night?"

"Of course. What would you suppose?" She gave him her lustrous smile. "I'll love it," she said softly, "because it's partly for you."

The rest of the evening was consumed for Banneker in writing and wiring, arranging reservations through his influence with a local railroad official whom he pried loose from a rubber of bridge at his club; while Io and Esther, dinnerless except for a hasty box of sandwiches, were back in Westchester packing and explaining to Mrs. Eyre. When the three reconvened in Io's drawing-room the traveler was prepared for an indefinite stay.

"If her condition is critical I'll wire for you," promised Io. "Otherwise you mustn't come."

With that he must make shift to be content; that and a swift clasp of her arms, a clinging pressure of her lips, and her soft "Good-bye. Oh, good-bye! Love me every minute while I'm gone," before the tactful Esther Forbes, somewhat miscast in the temporary rôle of Propriety, returned from a conversation with the porter to say that they really must get off that very instant or be carried westward to the eternal scandal of society which would not understand a triangular elopement.

Loneliness no longer beset Banneker, even though Io was farther separated from him than before in the unimportant reckoning of geographical miles; for now she was on his errand. He held her by the continuous thought of a vital common in-

terest. In place of the former bereavement of spirit was a new and consuming anxiety for Camilla Van Arsdale. Io's first telegram from Manzanita went far to appease that. Miss Van Arsdale had suffered a severe shock, but was now on the road to recovery: Io would stay indefinitely: there was no reason for Banneker's coming out for the present: in fact, the patient definitely prohibited it: letter followed.

The letter, when it came, forced a cry, as of physical pain, from Banneker's throat. Camilla Van Arsdale was going blind. Some obscure reflex of the heart trouble had affected the blood supply of the eyes, and the shock of discovering this had reacted upon the heart. There was no immediate danger; but neither was there ultimate hope of restored vision. So much the eminent oculist whom Io had brought from Angelica City told her.

Your first thought (wrote Io) will be to come out here at once. Don't. It will be much better for you to wait until she needs you more; until you can spend two or three weeks or a month with her. Now I can help her through the days by reading to her and walking with her. You don't know how happy it makes me to be here where I first knew you, to live over every event of those days. Your movable shack is almost as it used to be, though there is no absurd steel boat outside for me to stumble into.

Would you believe it; the new station-agent has a Sears-Roebuck catalogue! I borrowed it of him to read. What, oh, what should a sensible person — yes, I am a sensible person, Ban, outside of my love for you — and I'd scorn to be sensible about that — Where was I? Oh, yes; what should a sensible person find in these simple words "Two horse-power, reliable and smooth-running, economical of gasoline," and so on, to make her want to cry? Ban, send me a copy of "The Voices."

He sent her "The Undying Voices" and other books to read, and long, impassioned letters, and other letters to be read to Camilla Van Arsdale whose waning vision must be spared in every possible way.

Hour after hour (wrote Io) she sits at the piano and makes her wonderful music, and tries to write it down. There I can be of very little help to her. Then she will go back into her room and lie on the

big couch near the window where the young, low pines brush the wall, with Cousin Billy's photograph in her hands, and be so deathly quiet that I sometimes get frightened and creep up to the door to peer in and be sure that she is all right. To-day when I looked in at the door I heard her say, quite softly to herself: "I shall die without seeing his face again." I had to hold my breath and run out into the forest. Ban, I didn't know that it was in me to cry so — not since that night on the train when I left you. . . . This all seems so wicked and wrong and — yes — wasteful. Think of what these two splendid people could be to each other! She craves him so, Ban; just the sound of his voice, a word from him; but she won't break her own word. Sometimes I think I shall do it. Write me all you can about him, Ban, and send papers: all the political matter. You can't imagine what it is to her only to hear about him.

So Banneker had clippings collected, wrote a little daily political bulletin for Io; even went out of his way editorially to pay an occasional handsome tribute to Judge Enderby's personal character, whilst adducing cogent reasons why, as the "Wall Street and traction candidate," he should be defeated. But his personal opinion, expressed for the behoof of his correspondents in Manzanita, was that he probably could not be defeated; that his brilliant and aggressive campaign was forcing Marrineal to a defensive and losing fight.

"It is a great asset in politics," wrote Banneker to Miss Camilla, "to have nothing to hide or explain. If we're going to be licked, there is no man in the world whom I'd as gladly have win as Judge Enderby."

All this, of course, in the manner of one having interesting political news of no special import to the receiver of the news, to deliver; and quite without suggestion of any knowledge regarding her personal concern in the matter

But between the lines of Io's letters, full of womanly pity for Camilla Van Arsdale, of resentment for her thwarted and hopeless longing, Banneker thought to discern a crystallizing resolution. It would be so like Io's imperious temper to take the decision into her own hands, to bring about a meeting between the long-sundered lovers, to cast into the lonely and valiant woman's darkening life one brief and splendid glow of warmth and radi-

ance. For to Io, a summons for Willis Enderby to come would be no more than a defiance of the conventions. She knew nothing of the ruinous vengeance awaiting any breach of faith on his part, at the hands of a virulent and embittered wife; she did not even know that his coming would be a specific breach of faith, for Banneker, withheld by his promise of secrecy to Russell Edmonds, had never told her. Nor had he betrayed to her the espionage under which Enderby constantly moved; he shrank, naturally, from adding so ignoble an item to the weight of disrepute under which The Patriot already lay, in her mind.... Sooner or later he must face the question from her of why he had not resigned rather than put his honor in pawn to the baser uses of the newspaper and its owner's ambitions. To that question there could be no answer. He could not throw the onus of it upon her, by revealing to her that the necessity of protecting her name against the befoulment of The Searchlight was the compelling motive of his passivity. That was not within Banneker's code.

What, meantime, should be his course? Should he write and warn Io about Enderby? Could he make himself explicable without explaining too much? After all, what right had he to assume that she would gratuitously intermeddle in the disastrous fates of others? A rigorous respect for the rights of privacy was written into the rules of the game as she played it. He argued, with logic irrefutable as it was unconvincing, that this alone ought to stay her hand; yet he knew, by the power of their own yearning, one for the other, that in the great cause of love, whether for themselves or for Camilla Van Arsdale and Willis Enderby, she would resistlessly follow the impulse born and matured of her own passion. Had she not once before denied love... and to what end of suffering and bitter enlightenment and long waiting not yet ended! Yes; she would send for Willis Enderby.

Thus, with the insight of love, he read the heart of the loved one. Self-interest lifted its specious voice now, in contravention. If she did send, and if Judge Enderby went to Camilla Van Arsdale, as Banneker knew surely that he would, and if Ely Ives's spies discovered it, the way was made plain and peaceful

for Banneker. For, in that case, the blunderbuss of blackmail would be held to Enderby's head: he must, perforce, retire from the race on whatever pretext he might devise, under threat of a scandal which, in any case, would drive him out of public life. Marrineal would be nominated, probably elected; control of The Patriot would pass into Banneker's hands; The Searchlight would thus be held at bay until he and Io were married, for he could not really doubt that she would marry him, even though there lay between them an unexplained doubt and a seeming betrayal; and he could remould the distorted and debased policies of The Patriot to his heart's desire of an honest newspaper fearlessly presenting and supporting truth as he saw it.

All this at no price of treachery; merely by leaving matters which were, in fact, no concern of his, to the arbitrament of whatever fates might concern themselves with such troublous matters; it was just a matter of minding his own business and assuming that Io Eyre would do likewise. So argued self-interest, plausible, persuasive. He went to bed with the argument still unsettled, and, because it seethed in his mind, reached out to his reading-stand to cool his brain with the limpid philosophies of Stevenson's "Virginibus Puerisque."

"The cruellest lies are often told in silence," he read — the very letters of the words seemed to scorch his eyes with prophetic fires. "A man may have sat in a room for hours and not opened his teeth and yet come out of that room a disloyal friend or a vile calumniator. And how many loves have perished, because from —"

Banneker sprang from his bed, shaking. He dressed himself, consulted his watch, wrote a brief, urgent line to Io, after 'phoning for a taxi; carried it to the station himself, assured, though only by a few minutes' margin, of getting it into the latest Western mail, returned to bed and slept heavily and dreamlessly.... Not over the bodies of a loved friend and an honored foe would Errol Banneker climb to a place of safety for Io and triumph for himself.

Mail takes four days to reach Manzanita from New York.

Through the hot months The House With Three Eyes had kept its hospitable orbs darkened of Saturday nights. Therefore, Banneker was free to spend his week-ends at The Retreat, and his Friday and Saturday mail were forwarded to the nearest country post-office, whither he sent for it, or picked it up on his way back to town. It was on Saturday evening that he received the letter from Io, saying that she had written to Willis Enderby to come on to Manzanita and let the eyes, for which he had filled life's whole horizon since first they met his, look on him once more before darkness shut down on them forever. Her letter had crossed Banneker's.

"I know that he will come," she wrote. "He must come. It would be too cruel... and I know his heart."

Eight-thirty-six in the evening! And Io's letter to Enderby must have reached him in New York that morning. He would be taking the fast train for the West leaving at eleven. Banneker sent in a call on the long-distance 'phone for Judge Enderby's house. The twelve-minute wait was interminable to his grilling impatience. At length the placid tones of Judge Enderby's man responded. Yes; the Judge was there. No; he couldn't be disturbed on any account; very much occupied.

"This is Mr. Banneker. I must speak to him for just a moment. It's vital."

"Very sorry, sir," responded the unmoved voice. "But Judge Enderby's orders was absloot. Not to be disturbed on any account."

"Tell him that Mr. Banneker has something of the utmost importance to say to him before he leaves."

"Sorry, sir. It'd be as much as my place is worth."

Raging, Banneker nevertheless managed to control himself. "He is leaving on a trip to-night, is he not?"

After some hesitation the voice replied austerely: "I believe he is, sir. Good-bye."

Banneker cursed Judge Enderby for a fool of rigid methods. It would be his own fault. Let him go to his destruction, then. He, Banneker, had done all that was possible. He sank into a sort of lethargy, brooding over the fateful obstacles which had

obstructed him in his self-sacrificing pursuit of the right, as against his own dearest interests. He might telegraph Io; but to what purpose? An idea flashed upon him; why not telegraph Enderby at his home? He composed message after message; tore them up as saying too much or too little; ultimately devised one that seemed to be sufficient, and hurried to his car, to take it in to the local operator. When he reached the village office it was closed. He hurried to the home of the operator. Out. After two false trails, he located the man at a church sociable, and got the message off. It was then nearly ten o'clock. He had wasted precious moments in brooding. Well, he had done all and more than could have been asked of him, let the event be what it would.

His night was a succession of forebodings, dreamed or half-wakeful. Spent and dispirited, he rose at an hour quite out of accord with the habits of The Retreat, sped his car to New York, and put his inquiry to Judge Enderby's man.

Yes; the telegram had arrived. In time? No; it was delivered twenty minutes after the Judge had left for his train.

## Chapter XVIII

Sun-lulled into immobility, the desert around the lonely little station of Manzanita smouldered and slumbered. Nothing was visibly changed from five years before, when Banneker left, except that another agent, a disillusioned-appearing young man with a corn-colored mustache, came forth to meet the slow noon local, chuffing pantingly in under a bad head of alkali-water steam. A lone passenger, obviously Eastern in mien and garb, disembarked, and was welcomed by a dark, beautiful, harassed-looking girl who had just ridden in on a lathered pony. The agent, a hopeful soul, ambled within earshot.

"How is she?" he heard the man say, with the intensity of a single thought, as the girl took his hand. Her reply came, encouragingly.

"As brave as ever. Stronger, a little, I think."

"And she — the eyes?"

"She will be able to see you; but not clearly."

"How long —" began the man, but his voice broke. He shook in the bitter heat as if from some inner and deadly chill.

"Nobody can tell. She hoards her sight."

"To see me?" he cried eagerly. "Have you told her?"

"No."

"Is that wise?" he questioned. "The shock—"

"I think that she suspects; she senses your coming. Her face has the rapt expression that I have seen only when she plays. Has had since you started. Yet there is no possible way in which she could have learned."

"That is very wonderful," said the stranger, in a hushed voice. Then, hesitantly, "What shall I do, Io?"

"Nothing," came the girl's clear answer. "Go to her, that is all."

Another horse was led forward and the pair rode away through the glimmering heat.

It was a silent ride for Willis Enderby and Io. The girl was

still a little daunted at her own temerity in playing at fate with destinies as big as these. As for Enderby, there was no room within his consciousness for any other thought than that he was going to see Camilla Van Arsdale again.

He heard her before he saw her. The rhythms of a song, a tender and gay little lyric which she had sung to crowded drawing-rooms, but for him alone, long years past, floated out to him, clear and pure, through the clear, pure balm of the forest. He slipped quietly from his horse and saw her, through the window, seated at her piano.

Unchanged! To his vision the years had left no impress on her. And Io, at his side, saw too and marveled at the miracle. For the waiting woman looked out of eyes as clear and untroubled as those of a child, softened only with the questioning wistfulness of darkening vision. Suffering and fortitude had etherealized the face back to youth, and that mysterious expectancy which had possessed her for days had touched the curves of her mouth to a wonderful tenderness, the softness of her cheek to a quickening bloom. She turned her head slowly toward the door. Her lips parted with the pressure of swift, small breaths.

Io felt the man's tense body, pressed against her as if for support, convulsed with a tremor which left him powerless.

"I have brought some one to you, Miss Camilla," she said clearly: and in the same instant of speaking, her word was crossed by the other's call:

"Willis!"

Sightless though she was, as Io knew, for anything not close before her eyes, she came to him, as inevitably, as unerringly as steel to the magnet, and was folded in his arms. Io heard his deep voice, vibrant between desolation and passion:

"Fifteen years! My God, fifteen years!"

Io ran away into the forest, utterly glad with the joy of which she had been minister.

Willis Enderby stayed five days at Manzanita; five days of ecstasy, of perfect communion, bought from the rapacious years at the price of his broken word. For that he was willing to pay any price exacted, asking only that he might pay it alone, that

the woman of his long and self-denying love might not be called upon to meet any smallest part of the debt. She walked with him under the pines: he read to her: and there were long hours together over the piano. It was then that there was born, out of Camilla Van Arsdale's love and faith and coming abnegation, her holy and deathless song for the dead, to the noble words of the "Dominus Illuminatio Mea," which to-day, chanted over the coffins of thousands, brings comfort and hope to stricken hearts.

> "In the hour of death, after this life's whim,
> When the heart beats low, and the eyes grow dim,
> And pain has exhausted every limb —
> The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him."

On the last day she told him that they would not meet again. Life had given to her all and more than all she had dared ask for. He must go back to his work in the world, to the high endeavor that was laid upon him as an obligation of his power, and now of their love. He must write her; she could not do without that, now; but guardedly, for other eyes than hers must read his words to her.

"Think what it is going to be to me," she said, "to follow your course; to be able to pray for you, fighting. I shall take all the papers. And any which haven't your name in shall be burned at once! How I shall be jealous even of your public who love and admire you! But you have left me no room for any other jealousy..."

"I am coming back to you," he said doggedly, at the final moment of parting. "Sometime, Camilla."

"You will be here always, in the darkness, with me. And I shall love my blindness because it shuts out anything but you," she said.

Io rode with him to the station. On the way they discussed ways and means, the household arrangements when Io should have to leave, the finding of a companion, who should be at once nurse, secretary, and amanuensis for Royce Melvin's music.

"How she will sing now!" said Io.

As they drew near to the station, she put her hand on his horse's bridle.

"Did I do wrong to send for you, Cousin Billy?" she asked.

He turned to her a visage transfigured.

"You needn't answer," she said quickly. "I should know, anyway. It's her happiness I'm thinking of. It can't have been wrong to give so much happiness, for the rest of her life."

"The rest of her life," he echoed, in a hushed accent of dread.

While Enderby was getting his ticket, Io waited on the front platform. A small, wiry man came around the corner of the station, glanced at her, and withdrew. Io had an uneasy notion of having seen him before somewhere. But where, and when? Certainly the man was not a local habitant. Had his presence, then, any significance for her or hers? Enderby returned, and the two stood in the hard morning sunlight beneath the broad sign inscribed with the station's name.

The stranger appeared from behind a freight-car on a siding, and hurried up to within a few yards of them. From beneath his coat he slipped a blackish oblong. It gave forth a click, and, after swift manipulation, a second click. Enderby started toward the snap-shotter who turned and ran.

"Do you know that man?" he asked, whirling upon Io.

A gray veil seemed to her drawn down over his features. Or was it a mist of dread upon Io's own vision?

"I have seen him before," she answered, groping.

"Who is he?"

Memory flashed one of its sudden and sure illuminations upon her: a Saturday night at The House With Three Eyes; this little man coming in with Tertius Marrineal; later, peering into the flowerful corner where she sat with Banneker.

"He has something to do with The Patriot," she answered steadily.

"How could The Patriot know of my coming here?'

"I don't know," said Io. She was deadly pale with a surmise too monstrous for utterance.

He put it into words for her.

"Io, did you tell Errol Banneker that you were sending for me?"

"Yes."

Even in the midst of the ruin which he saw closing in upon his career — that career upon which Camilla Van Arsdale had newly built her last pride and hope and happiness — he could feel for the agony of the girl before him.

"He couldn't have betrayed me!" cried Io: but, as she spoke, the memory of other treacheries overwhelmed her.

The train rumbled in. Enderby stooped and kissed her forehead.

"My dear," he said gently, "I'm afraid you've trusted him once too often."

## Chapter XIX

Among his various amiable capacities, Ely Ives included that of ceremonial arranger. Festivities were his delight; he was ever on the lookout for occasions of celebration: any excuse for a gratulatory function sufficed him. Before leaving on his chase to Manzanita, he had conceived the festal notion of a dinner in honor of Banneker, not that he cherished any love for him since the episode of the bet with Delavan Eyre, but because his shrewd foresight perceived in it a closer binding of the editor to the wheels of the victorious Patriot. Also it might indirectly redound to the political advantage of Marrineal. Put thus to that astute and aspiring public servant, it enlisted his prompt support. He himself would give the feast: no, on better thought, The Patriot should give it. It would be choice rather than large: a hundred guests or so; mainly journalistic, the flower of Park Row, with a sprinkling of important politicians and financiers. The occasion? Why, the occasion was pat to hand! The thousandth Banneker editorial to be published in The Patriot, the date of which came early in the following month.

Had Ives himself come to Banneker with any such project, it would have been curtly rejected. Ives kept in the background. The proposal came from Marrineal, and in such form that for the recipient of the honor to refuse it would have appeared impossibly churlish. Little though he desired or liked such a function, Banneker accepted with a good grace, and set himself to write an editorial, special to the event. Its title was, "What Does Your Newspaper Mean to You?" headed with the quotation from the Areopagitica: and he compressed into a single column all his dreams and idealities of what a newspaper might be and mean to the public which it sincerely served. Specially typed and embossed, it was arranged as the dinner souvenir.

As the day drew near, Banneker had less and less taste for the ovation. Forebodings had laid hold on his mind. Enderby had been back for five days, and had taken no part whatever in the

current political activity. Conflicting rumors were in the air. The anti-Marrineal group was obviously in a state of confusion and doubt: Marrineal's friends were excited, uncertain, expectant.

For three days Banneker had had no letter from Io.

The first intimation of what had actually occurred came to him just before he left the office to dress for the dinner in his honor. Willis Enderby had formally withdrawn from the governorship contest. His statement, given out for publication in next morning's papers, was in the office. Banneker sent for it. The reason given was formal and brief; nervous breakdown; imperative orders from his physician. The whole thing was grisly plain to Banneker, but he must have confirmation. He went to the city editor. Had any reporter been sent to see Judge Enderby?

Yes: Dilson, one of the men frequently assigned to do Marrineal's and Ives's special work had been sent to Enderby's on the previous day with specific instructions to ask a single question: "When was the Judge going to issue his formal withdrawal": Yes: that was the precise form of the question: not, "Was he going to withdraw," but "When was he," and so on.

The Judge would not answer, except to say that he might have a statement to make within twenty-four hours. This afternoon (continued the city editor) Enderby, it was understood, had telephoned to The Sphere and asked that Russell Edmonds come to his house between four and five. No one else would do. Edmonds had gone, had been closeted with Enderby for an hour, and had emerged with the brief typed statement for distribution to all the papers. He would not say a word as to the interview. Judge Enderby absolutely denied himself to all callers. Physician's orders again.

Banneker reflected that if the talk between Edmonds and Enderby had been what he could surmise, the veteran would hardly attend the dinner in his (Banneker's) honor. Honor and Banneker would be irreconcilable terms, to the stern judgment of Pop Edmonds. Had they, indeed, become irreconcilable terms? It was a question which Banneker, in the turmoil of his mind, could not face. On his way along Park Row he stopped and had

a drink. It seemed to produce no effect, so presently he had another. After the fourth, he clarified and enlarged his outlook upon the whole question, which he now saw in its entirety. He perceived himself as the victim of unique circumstances, forced by the demands of honor into what might seem, to unenlightened minds, dubious if not dishonorable positions, each one of them in reality justified: yes, necessitated! Perhaps he was at fault in his very first judgment; perhaps, had he even then, in his inexperience, seen what he now saw so clearly in the light of experience, the deadly pitfalls into which journalism, undertaken with any other purpose than the simple setting forth of truth, beguiles its practitioners — perhaps he might have drawn back from the first step of passive deception and have resigned rather than been a party to the suppression of the facts about the Veridian killings. Resigned? And forfeited all his force for education, for enlightenment, for progress of thought and belief, exerted upon millions of minds through The Patriot?... Would that not have been the way of cowardice?... He longed to be left to himself. To think it all out. What would Io say, if she knew everything? Io whose silence was surrounding him with a cold terror.... He had to get home and dress for that cursed dinner!

Marrineal had done the thing quite royally. The room was superb with flowers; the menu the best devisable; the wines not wide of range, but choice of vintage. The music was by professionals of the first grade, willing to give their favors to these powerful men of the press. The platform table was arranged for Marrineal in the presiding chair, flanked by Banneker and the mayor: Horace Vanney, Gaines, a judge of the Supreme Court, two city commissioners, and an eminent political boss. The Masters, senior and junior, had been invited, but declined, the latter politely, the former quite otherwise. Below were the small group tables, to be occupied by Banneker's friends and contemporaries of local newspaperdom, and a few outsiders, literary, theatrical, and political. When Banneker appeared in the reception-room where the crowd awaited, smiling, graceful, vigorous, and splendid as a Greek athlete, the whole assemblage rose in acclaim — all but one. Russell Edmonds, somber and thought-

ful, kept his seat. His leonine head drooped over his broad shirt-bosom.

Said Mallory of The Ledger, bending over him:

"Look at Ban, Pop!"

"I'm looking," gloomed Edmonds.

"What's behind that smile? Something frozen. What's the matter with him?" queried the observant Mallory.

"Too much success."

"It'll be too much dinner if he doesn't look out," remarked the other. "He's trying to match cocktails with every one that comes up."

"Won't make a bit of difference," muttered the veteran. "He's all steel. Cold steel. Can't touch him."

Marrineal led the way out of the ante-room to the banquet, escorting Banneker. Never had the editor of The Patriot seemed to be more completely master of himself. The drink had brightened his eyes, brought a warm flush to the sun-bronze of his cheek, lent swiftness to his tongue. He was talking brilliantly, matching epigrams with the Great Gaines, shrewdly poking good-natured fun at the stolid and stupid mayor, holding his and the near-by tables in spell with reminiscences in which so many of them shared. Some wondered how he would have anything left for his speech.

While the game course was being served, Ely Ives was summoned outside. Banneker, whose faculties had taken on a preternatural acuteness, saw, when he returned, that his face had whitened and sharpened; watched him write a note which he folded and pinned before sending it to Marrineal. In the midst of a story, which he carried without interruption, the guest of honor perceived a sort of glaze settle over his chief's immobile visage; the next moment he had very slightly shaken his head at Ives. Banneker concluded his story. Marrineal capped it with another. Ives, usually abstemious as befits one who practices sleight-of-hand and brain, poured his empty goblet full of champagne and emptied it in long, eager draughts. The dinner went on.

The ices were being cleared away when a newspaper man, not

in evening clothes, slipped in and talked for a moment with Mr. Gordon of The Ledger. Presently another quietly appropriated a seat next to Van Cleve of The Sphere. The tidings, whatever they were, spread. Then, the important men of the different papers gathered about Russell Edmonds. They seemed to be putting to him brief inquiries, to which he answered with set face and confirming nods. With his quickened faculties, Banneker surmised one of those inside secrets of journalism so often sacredly kept, though a hundred men know them, of which the public reads only the obvious facts, the empty shell. Now and again he caught a quick and veiled glance of incomprehension. of doubt, of incredulity, cast at him.

He chattered on. Never did he talk more brilliantly.

Coffee. Presently there would be cigars. Then Marrineal would introduce him, and he would say to these men, this high and inner circle of journalism, the things which he could not write for his public, which he could present to them alone, since they alone would understand. It was to be his *magnum opus*, that speech. For a moment he had lost physical visualization in mental vision. When again he let his eyes rest on the scene before him, he perceived that a strange thing had happened. The table at which Van Cleve had sat, with seven others, was empty. In the same glance he saw Mr. Gordon rise and quietly walk out, followed by the other newspaper men in the group. Two politicians were left. They moved close to each other and spoke in whispers, looking curiously at Banneker.

What manner of news could that have been, brought in by the working newspaper man, thus to depopulate a late-hour dining-table? Had the world turned upside down?

Below him, and but a few paces distant, Tommy Burt was seated. When he, too, got slowly to his feet, Banneker leaned across the strewn, white napery toward him.

"What's up, Tommy?"

For an instant the star reporter stopped, seemed to turn an answer over in his mind, then shook his head, and, with an unfathomable look of incredulity and shrinking, went his way. Bunny Fitch followed; Fitch, the slave of his paper's conven-

tions, the man without standards other than those which were made for him by the terms of his employment, who would go only because his proprietors would have him go: and the grin which he turned up to Banneker was malignant and scornful. Already the circle about Ely Ives, who was still drinking eagerly, had melted away. Glidden, Mallory, Gale, Andreas, and a dozen others of his oldest associates were at the door, not talking as they would have done had some "big story" broken at that hour, but moving in a chill silence and purposefully like men seeking relief from an unendurable atmosphere. The deadly suspicion of the truth struck in upon the guest of honor; they, his friends, were going because they could no longer take part in honoring him. His mind groped, terrified and blind, among black shadows.

Marrineal, for once allowing discomposure to ruffle his imperturbability, rose to check the exodus.

"Gentlemen! One moment, if you please. As soon as —"

The rest was lost to Banneker as he beheld Edmonds rear his spare form up from his chair a few paces away. Reckless of ceremony now, the central figure of the feast rose.

"Edmonds! Pop!"

The veteran stopped, turning the slow, sad judgment of his eyes upon the other.

"What is it?" appealed Banneker. "What's happened? Tell me."

"Willis Enderby is dead."

The query, which forced itself from Banneker's lips, was a self-accusation. "By his own hand?"

"By yours," answered Edmonds, and strode from the place.

Groping, Banneker's fingers encountered a bottle, closed about it, drew it in. He poured and drank. He thought it wine. Not until the reeking stab of brandy struck to his brain did he realize the error.... All right. Brandy. He needed it. He was going to make a speech. What speech? How did it begin....What was this that Marrineal was saying? "In view of the tragic news.... Call off the speech-making?" Not at all! He, Banneker, must have his chance. He could explain everything.

Brilliantly, convincingly to his own mind, he began. It was

all right; only the words in their eagerness to set forth the purity of his motives, the unimpeachable rectitude of his standards, became confused. Somebody was plucking at his arm. Ives? All right? Ives was a good fellow, after all.... Yes: he'd go home — with Ives. Ives would understand.

All the way back to The House With Three Eyes he explained himself; any fair-minded man would see that he had done his best. Ives was fair-minded; he saw it. Ives was a man of judgment. Therefore, when he suggested bed, he must be right. Very weary, Banneker was. He felt very, very wretched about Enderby. He'd explain it all to Enderby in the morning — no: couldn't do that, though. Enderby was dead. Queer idea, that! What was it that violent-minded idiot, Pop Edmonds, had said? He'd settle with Pop in the morning. Now he'd go to sleep....

He woke to utter misery. In the first mail came the letter, now expected, from Io. It completed the catastrophe in which his every hope was swept away.

I have tried to make myself believe (she wrote) that you could not have betrayed him; that you would not, at least, have let me, who loved you, be, unknowingly, the agent of his destruction. But the black record comes back to me. The Harvey Wheelwright editorial, which seemed so light a thing, then. The lie that beat Robert Laird. The editorial that you dared not print, after promising. All of one piece. How could I ever have trusted you!

Oh, Ban, Ban! When I think of what we have been to each other; how gladly, how proudly, I gave myself to you, to find you unfaithful! Is that the price of success? And unfaithful in such a way! If you had been untrue to me in the conventional sense, I think it would have been a small matter compared to this betrayal. That would have been a thing of the senses, a wound to the lesser part of our love. But this — Couldn't you see that our relation demanded more of faith, of fidelity, than marriage, to justify it and sustain it; more idealism, more truth, more loyalty to what we were to each other? And now this!

If it were I alone that you have betrayed, I could bear my own remorse; perhaps even think it retribution for what I have done. But how can I — and how can you — bear the remorse of the disaster that will fall upon Camilla Van Arsdale, your truest friend? What is there left to her, now that the man she loves is to be hounded out of public

life by blackmailers? I have not told her. I have not been able to tell her. Perhaps he will write her, himself. How can she bear it! I am going away, leaving a companion in charge of her.

Camilla Van Arsdale! One last drop of bitterness in the cup of suffering. Neither she nor Io had, of course, learned of Enderby's death, and could not for several days, until the newspapers reached them. Banneker perceived clearly the thing that was laid upon him to do. He must go out to Manzanita and take the news to her. That was part of his punishment. He sent a telegram to Mindle, his factotum on the ground.

Hold all newspapers from Miss C. until I get there, if you have to rob mails.

E. B.

Without packing his things, without closing his house, without resigning his editorship, he took the next train for Manzanita. Io, coming East, and still unaware of the final tragedy, passed him, halfway.

While the choir was chanting, over the body of Willis Enderby, the solemn glory of Royce Melvin's funeral hymn, the script of which had been found attached to his last statement, Banneker, speeding westward, was working out, in agony of soul, a great and patient penance, for his own long observance, planning the secret and tireless ritual through which Camilla Van Arsdale should keep intact her pure and long delayed happiness while her life endured.

## Chapter XX

A dun pony ambled along the pine-needle-carpeted trail leading through the forest toward Camilla Van Arsdale's camp, comfortably shaded against the ardent power of the January sun. Behind sounded a soft, rapid padding of hooves. The pony shied to the left with a violence which might have unseated a less practiced rider, as, with a wild whoop, Dutch Pete came by at full gallop. Pete had been to a dance at the Sick Coyote on the previous night which had imperceptibly merged itself into the present morning, and had there imbibed enough of the spirit of the occasion to last him his fifteen miles home to his ranch. Now he pulled up and waited for the slower rider to overtake him.

"Howdy, Ban!"

"Hello, Pete."

"How's the lady gettin' on?"

"Not too well."

"Can't see much of anythin', huh?"

"No: and never will again."

"Sho! Well, I don't figger out as I'd want to live long in that fix. How long does the doc give her, Ban?"

"Perhaps six months; perhaps a year. She isn't afraid to die; but she's hanging to life just as long as she can. She's a game one, Pete."

"And how long will you be with us, Ban?"

"Oh, I'm likely to be around quite a while yet."

Dutch Pete, thoroughly understanding, reflected that here was another game one. But he remarked only that he'd like to drop in on Miss K'miller next time he rode over, with a bit of sage honey that he'd saved out for her.

"She'll be glad to see you," returned the other. "Only, don't forget, Pete; not a word about anything except local stuff."

"Sure!" agreed Pete with that unquestioning acceptance of another's reasons for secrecy which marks the frontiersman. "Say, Ban," he added, "you ain't much of an advertisement for

Manzanita as a health resort, yourself. Better have that doc stick his head in your mouth and look at your insides."

Banneker raised tired eyes and smiled. "Oh, I'm all right," he replied listlessly.

"Come to next Saturday's dance at the Coyote; that'll put dynamite in your blood," prescribed the other as he spurred his horse on.

Banneker had no need to turn the dun pony aside to the branch trail that curved to the door of his guest; the knowing animal took it by habitude, having traversed it daily for a long time. It was six months since Banneker had bought him: six months and a week since Willis Enderby had been buried. And the pony's rider had in his pocket a letter, of date only four days old, from Willis Enderby to Camilla Van Arsdale. It was dated from the Governor's Mansion, Albany, New York. Banneker had written it himself, the night before. He had also composed nearly a column of supposed Amalgamated Wire report, regarding the fight for and against Governor Enderby's reform measures, which he would read presently to Miss Van Arsdale from the dailies just received. As he dismounted, the clear music of her voice called:

"Any mail, Ban?"

"Yes. Letter from Albany."

"Let me open it myself," she cried jealously.

He delivered it into her hands: this was part of the ritual. She ran her fingers caressingly over it, as if to draw from it the hidden sweetness of her lover's strength, which must still be only half-expressed, because the words were to be translated through another's reading; then returned it to its real author.

"Read it slowly, Ban," she commanded softly.

Having completed the letter, his next process was to run through the papers, giving in full any news or editorials on State politics. This was a task demanding the greatest mental concentration and alertness, for he had built up a contemporary history out of his imagination, and must keep all the details congruous and logical. Several times, with that uncanny retentiveness of memory developed in the blind, she had all but caught

him; but each time his adroitness saved the day. Later, while he was at work in the room which she had set aside for his daily writing, she would answer the letter on the typewriter, having taught herself to write by position and touch, and he would take her reply for posting. Her nurse and companion, an elderly woman with a natural aptitude for silence and discretion, was Banneker's partner in the secret. The third member of the conspiracy was the physician who came once a week from Angelica City because he himself was a musician and this slowly and courageously dying woman was Royce Melvin. Between them they hedged her about with the fiction that victoriously defied grief and defeated death.

Camilla Van Arsdale got up from her couch and walked with confident footsteps to the piano.

"Ban," she said, seating herself and letting her fingers run over the keys, "can't you substitute another word for 'muffled' in the third line? It comes on a high note — upper g — and I want a long, not a short vowel sound."

"How would 'silenced' do?" he offered, after studying the line.

"Beautifully. You're a most amiable poet! Ban, I think your verses are going to be more famous than my music."

"Never that," he denied. "It's the music that makes them."

"Have you heard from Mr. Gaines yet about the essays?"

"Yes. He's taking them. He wants to print two in each issue and call them 'Far Perspectives.'"

"Oh, good!" she cried. "But, Ban, fine as your work is, it seems a terrible waste of your powers to be out here. You ought to be in New York, helping the governor put through his projects."

"Well, you know, the doctor won't give me my release."

(Presently he must remember to have a coughing spell. He coughed hollowly and well, thanks to assiduous practice. This was part of the grim and loving comedy of deception: that he had been peremptorily ordered back to Manzanita on account of "weak lungs," with orders to live in his open shack until he had gained twenty pounds. He was gaining, but with well-considered slowness.)

"But when you can, you'll go back and help him, even if I'm not here to know about it, won't you?"

"Oh, yes: I'll go back to help him when I can," he promised, as heartily as if he had not made the same promise each time that the subject came up. There was still a good deal of the wistful child about the dying woman.

Out from that forest hermitage where the two worked, one in serene though longing happiness, the other under the stern discipline of loss and self-abnegation, had poured, in six short months, a living current of song which had lifted the fame of Royce Melvin to new heights: her fame only, for Banneker would not use his name to the words that rang with a pure and vivid melody of their own. Herein, too, he was paying his debt to Willis Enderby, through the genius of the woman who loved him; preserving that genius with the thin, lustrous, impregnable fiction of his own making against threatening and impotent truth.

Once, when Banneker had brought her a lyric, alive with the sweetness of youth and love in the great open spaces, she had said:

"Ban, shall we call it 'Io?'"

"I don't think it would do," he said with an effort.

"Where is she?"

"Traveling in the tropics."

"You try so hard to keep the sadness out of your voice when you speak of her," said Camilla sorrowfully. "But it's always there. Isn't there anything I can do?"

"Nothing. There's nothing anybody can do."

The blind woman hesitated. "But you care for her still, don't you, Ban?"

"Care! Oh, my God!" whispered Banneker.

"And she cares. I know she cared when she was here. Io isn't the kind of woman to forget easily. She tried once, you know." Miss Van Arsdale smiled wanly. "Why doesn't she ever say anything of you in her letters?"

"She does."

"Very little." (Io's letters, passing through Banneker's hands were carefully censored, of necessity, to forefend any allusion to

the tragedy of Willis Enderby, often to the extent of being rewritten complete. It now occurred to Banneker that he had perhaps overdone the matter of keeping his own name out of them.) "Ban," she continued wistfully, "you haven't quarreled, have you?"

"No, Miss Camilla. We haven't quarreled."

"Then *what* is it, Ban? I don't want to pry; you know me well enough to be sure of that. But if I could only know before the end comes that you two — I wish I could read your face. It's a helpless thing, being blind." This was as near a complaint as he had ever heard her utter.

"Io's a rich woman, Miss Camilla," he said desperately.

"What of it?"

"How could I ask her to marry a jobless, half-lunged derelict?"

"*Have* you asked her?"

He was silent.

"Ban, does she know why you're here?"

"Oh, yes; she knows."

"How bitter and desolate your voice sounds when you say that! And you want me to believe that she knows and still doesn't come to you?"

"She doesn't know that I'm — ill," he said, hating himself for the necessity of pretense with Camilla Van Arsdale.

"Then I shall tell her."

"No," he controverted with finality, "I won't allow it."

"Suppose it turned out that this were really the right path for you to travel," she said after a pause; "that you were going to do bigger things here than you ever could do with The Patriot? I believe it's going to be so, Ban; that what you are doing now is going to be your true success."

"Success!" he cried. "Are you going to preach success to me? If ever there was a word coined in hell — I'm sorry, Miss Camilla," he broke off, mastering himself.

She groped her way to the piano, and ran her fingers over the keys. "There is work, anyway," she said with sure serenity.

"Yes; there's work, thank God!"

Work enough there was for him, not only in his writing, for

which he had recovered the capacity after a long period of stunned inaction, but in the constant and unwearied labor of love in building and rebuilding, fortifying and extending, that precarious but still impregnable bulwark of falsehood beneath whose protection Camilla Van Arsdale lived and was happy and made the magic of her song. Illusion! Banneker wondered whether any happiness were other than illusion, whether the illusion of happiness were not better than any reality. But in the world of grim fact which he had accepted for himself was no palliating mirage. Upon him "the illusive eyes of hope" were closed.

While Banneker was practicing his elaborate deceptions, Miss Van Arsdale had perpetrated a lesser one of her own, which she had not deemed it wise to reveal to him in their conversation about Io. Some time before that she had written to her former guest a letter tactfully designed to lay a foundation for resolving the difficulty or misunderstanding between the lovers. In the normal course of events this would have been committed for mailing to Banneker, who would, of course, have confiscated it. But, as it chanced, it was hardly off the typewriter when Dutch Pete dropped in for a friendly call while Banneker was at the village, and took the missive with him for mailing. It traveled widely, amassed postmarks and forwarding addresses, and eventually came to its final port.

Worn out with the hopeless quest of forgetfulness in far lands, Io Eyre came back to New York. It was there that the long pursuit of her by Camilla Van Arsdale's letter ended. Bewilderment darkened Io's mind as she read, to be succeeded by an appalled conjecture; Camilla Van Arsdale's mind had broken down under her griefs. What other hypothesis could account for her writing of Willis Enderby as being still alive? And of her having letters from him? To the appeal for Banneker which, concealed though it was, underlay the whole purport of the writing, Io closed her heart, seared by the very sight of his name. She would have torn the letter up, but something impelled her to read it again; some hint of a pregnant secret to be gleaned from it, if one but held the clue. Hers was a keen and thoughtful mind. She sent it exploring

through the devious tangle of the maze wherein she and Banneker, Camilla Van Arsdale and Willis Enderby had been so tragically involved, and as she patiently studied the letter as possible guide there dawned within her a glint of the truth. It began with the suspicion, soon growing to conviction, that the writer of those inexplicable words was not, could not be insane; the letter breathed a clarity of mind, an untroubled simplicity of heart, a quiet undertone of happiness, impossible to reconcile with the picture of a shattered and grief-stricken victim. Yet Io had, herself, written to Miss Van Arsdale as soon as she knew of Judge Enderby's death, pouring out her heart for the sorrow of the woman who as a stranger had stood her friend, whom, as she learned to know her in the close companionship of her affliction, she had come to love; offering to return at once to Manzanita. To that offer had come no answer; later she had had a letter curiously reticent as to Willis Enderby. (Banneker, in his epistolary personification of Miss Van Arsdale had been perhaps overcautious on this point.) Io began to piece together hints and clues, as in a disjected puzzle: — Barneker's presence in Manzanita — Camilla's blindness.— Her inability to know, except through the medium of others, the course of events.— The bewildering reticence and hiatuses in the infrequent letters from Manzanita, particularly in regard to Willis Enderby.— This calm, sane, cheerful view of him as a living being, a present figure in his old field of action.— The casual mention in an early letter that all of Miss Van Arsdale's reading and most of her writing was done through the nurse or Banneker, mainly the latter, though she was mastering the art of touch-writing on the typewriter. The very style of the earlier letters, as she remembered them, was different. And just here flashed the thought which set her feverishly ransacking the portfolio in which she kept her old correspondence. There she found an envelope with a Manzanita postmark dated four months earlier. The typing of the two letters was not the same.

Groping for some aid in the murk, Io went to the telephone and called up the editorial office of The Sphere, asking for Russell Edmonds. Within two hours the veteran had come to her.

"I have been wanting to see you," he said at once.

"About Mr. Banneker?" she queried eagerly.

"No. About The Searchlight."

"The Searchlight? I don't understand, Mr. Edmonds."

"Can't we be open with each other, Mrs. Eyre?"

"Absolutely, so far as I am concerned."

"Then I want to tell you that you need have no fear as to what The Searchlight may do."

"Still I don't understand. Why should I fear it?"

"The scandal — manufactured, of course — which The Searchlight had cooked up about you and Mr. Banneker before Mr. Eyre's death."

"Surely there was never anything published. I should have heard of it."

"No; there wasn't. Banneker stopped it."

"Ban?"

"Do you mean to say that you knew nothing of this, Mrs. Eyre?" he said, the wonder in his face answering the bewilderment in hers. "Didn't Banneker tell you?"

"Never a word."

'No; I suppose he wouldn't," ruminated the veteran. "That would be like Ban — the old Ban," he added sadly. "Mrs. Eyre, I loved that boy," he broke out, his stern and somber face working. "There are times even now when I can scarcely make myself believe that he did what he did."

"Wait," pleaded Io. "How did he stop The Searchlight?"

"By threatening Bussey with an exposé that would have blown him out of the water. Blackmail, if you like, Mrs. Eyre, and not of the most polite kind."

"For me," whispered Io.

"He held that old carrion-buzzard, Bussey, up at the muzzle of The Patriot as if it were a blunderbuss. It was loaded to kill, too. And then," pursued Edmonds, "he paid the price. Marrineal got out his little gun and held him up."

"Held Ban up? What for? How could he do that? All this is a riddle to me, Mr. Edmonds."

"Do you think you really want to know?" asked the other with a touch of grimness. "It won't be pleasant hearing."

"I've got to know. Everything!"

"Very well. Here's the situation. Banneker points his gun, The Patriot, at Bussey. 'Be good or I'll shoot,' he says. Marrineal learns of it, never mind how. He points *his* gun at Ban. 'Be good, or I'll shoot,' says he. And there you are!"

"But what was his gun? And why need he threaten Ban?"

"Why, you see, Mrs. Eyre, about that time things were coming to an issue between Ban and Marrineal. Ban was having a hard fight for the independence of his editorial page. His strongest hold on Marrineal was Marrineal's fear of losing him. There were plenty of opportunities open to a Banneker. Well, when Marrineal got Ban where he couldn't resign, Ban's hold was gone. That was Marrineal's gun."

"Why couldn't he resign?" asked Io, white-lipped.

"If he quit The Patriot he could no longer hold Bussey, and The Searchlight could print what it chose. You see?"

"I see," said Io, very low. "Oh, why couldn't I have seen before!"

"How could you, if Ban told you nothing?" reasoned Edmonds. "The blame of the miserable business isn't yours. Sometimes I wonder if it's anybody's; if the newspaper game isn't just too strong for us who try to play it. As for The Searchlight, I've since got another hold on Bussey which will keep him from making any trouble. That's what I wanted to tell you."

"Oh, what does it matter! What does it matter!" she moaned. She crossed to the window, laid her hot and white face against the cool glass, pressed her hands in upon her temples, striving to think connectedly. "Then whatever he did on The Patriot, whatever compromises he yielded to or — or cowardices —" she winced at the words — "were done to save his place; to save me."

"I'm afraid so," returned the other gently.

"Do you know what he's doing now?" she demanded.

"I understand he's back at Manzanita."

"He is. And from what I can make out," she added fiercely, "he is giving up his life to guarding Miss Van Arsdale from breaking her heart, as she will do, if she learns of Judge Enderby's death — Oh!" she cried, "I didn't mean to say that! You must forget that there was anything said."

"No need. I know all that story," he said gravely. "That is what I couldn't forgive in Ban. That he should have betrayed Miss Van Arsdale, his oldest friend. That is the unpardonable treachery."

"To save me," said Io.

"Not even for that. He owed more to her than to you."

"I can't believe that he did it!" she wailed. "To use my letter to set spies on Cousin Billy and ruin him—it isn't Ban. It isn't!"

"He did it, and, when it was too late, he tried to stop it."

"To stop it?" She looked her startled query at him. "How do you know that?"

"Last week," explained Edmonds, "Judge Enderby's partner sent for me. He had been going over some papers and had come upon a telegram from Banneker urging Enderby not to leave without seeing him. The telegram must have been delivered very shortly after the Judge left for the train."

"Telegram? Why a telegram? Wasn't Ban in town?"

"No. He was down in Jersey. At The Retreat."

"Wait!" gasped Io. "At The Retreat! Then my letter would have been forwarded to him there. He couldn't have got it at the same time that Cousin Billy got the one I sent him." She gripped Russell Edmonds's wrists in fierce, strong hands. "What if he hadn't known in time? What if, the moment he did know, he did his best to stop Cousin Billy from starting, with that telegram?" Suddenly the light died out of her face. "But then how would that loathsome Mr. Ives have known that he was going, unless Ban betrayed him?"

"Easily enough," returned the veteran. "He had a report from his detectives, who had been watching Enderby for months. . . . Mrs. Eyre, I wish you'd give me a drink. I feel shaky."

She left him to give the order. When she returned, they had both steadied down. Carefully, and with growing conviction, they gathered the evidence into something like a coherent whole. At the end, Io moaned:

"The one thing I can't bear is that Cousin Billy died, believing that of Ban."

She threw herself upon the broad lounge, prone, her face

buried in her arms. The veteran of hundreds of fights, brave and blind, righteous and mistaken, crowned with fleeting victories, tainted with irremediable errors, stood silent, perplexed, mournful. He walked slowly over to where the girl was stretched, and laid a clumsy, comforting hand on her shoulder.

"I wish you'd cry for me, too," he said huskily. "I'm too old."

## Chapter XXI

Every Saturday the distinguished physician from Angelica City came to Manzanita on the afternoon train, spent two or three hours at Camilla Van Arsdale's camp, and returned in time to catch Number Seven back. No imaginable fee would have induced him to abstract one whole day from his enormous practice for any other patient. But he was himself an ardent vocal amateur, and to keep Royce Melvin alive and able to give forth her songs to the world was a special satisfaction to his soul. Moreover, he knew enough of Banneker's story to take pride in being partner in his plan of deception and self-sacrifice. He pretended that it was a needed holiday for him: his bills hardly defrayed the traveling expense.

Now, riding back with Banneker, he meditated a final opinion, and out of that opinion came speech.

"Mr. Banneker, they ought to give you and me a special niche in the Hall of Fame," he said.

A rather wan smile touched briefly Banneker's lips. "I believe that my ambitions once reached even that far," he said.

The other reflected upon the implied tragedy of a life, so young, for which ambition was already in the past tense, as he added:

"In the musical section. We've got our share in the nearest thing to great music that has been produced in the America of our time. You and I. Principally you."

Banneker made a quick gesture of denial.

"I don't know what you owe to Camilla Van Arsdale, but you've paid the debt. There won't be much more to pay, Banneker."

Banneker looked up sharply.

"No." The visitor shook his graying head. "We've performed as near a miracle as it is given to poor human power to perform. It can't last much longer."

"How long?"

"A matter of weeks. Not more. Banneker, do you believe in a personal immortality?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

"I don't know, either. I was thinking....If it were so; when she gets across, what she will feel when she finds her man waiting for her. God!" He lifted his face to the great trees that moved and murmured overhead. "How that heart of hers has sung to him all these years!"

He lifted his voice and sent it rolling through the cathedral aisles of the forest, in the superb finale of the last hymn.

> "For even the purest delight may pall,
> And power must fail, and the pride must fall
> And the love of the dearest friends grow small —
> But the glory of the Lord is all in all."

The great voice was lost in the sighing of the winds. They rode on, thoughtful and speechless. When the physician turned to his companion again, it was with a brisk change of manner.

"And now we'll consider you."

"Nothing to consider," declared Banneker.

"Is your professional judgment better than mine?" retorted the other. "How much weight have you lost since you've been out here?"

"I don't know."

"Find out. Don't sleep very well, do you?

"Not specially."

"What do you do at night when you can't sleep? Work?"

"No."

"Well?"

"Think."

The doctor uttered a non-professional monosyllable. "What will you do," he propounded, waving his arm back along the trail toward the Van Arsdale camp, "when this little game of yours is played out?"

"God knows!" said Banneker. It suddenly struck him that life would be blank, empty of interest or purpose, when Camilla Van Arsdale died, when there was no longer the absorbing necessity to preserve, intact and impregnable, the fortress of love and lies wherewith he had surrounded her.

"When this chapter is finished," said the other, "you come

down to Angelica City with me. Perhaps we'll go on a little camping trip together. I want to talk to you."

The train carried him away. Oppressed and thoughtful, Banneker walked slowly across the blazing, cactus-set open toward his shack. There was still the simple housekeeping work to be done, for he had left early that morning. He felt suddenly spiritless, flaccid, too inert even for the little tasks before him. The physician's pronouncement had taken the strength from him. Of course he had known that it couldn't be very long — but only a few weeks!

He was almost at the shack when he noticed that the door stood half ajar.

But here, where everything had been disorder, was now order. The bed was made, the few utensils washed, polished, and hung up; on the table a handful of the alamo's bright leaves in a vase gave a touch of color.

In the long chair (7 T 4031 of the Sears-Roebuck catalogue) sat Io. A book lay on her lap, the book of "The Undying Voices." Her eyes were closed. Banneker reached out a hand to the door lintel for support.

A light tremor ran through Io's body. She opened her eyes, and fixed them on Banneker. She rose slowly. The book fell to the floor and lay open between them. Io stood, her arms hanging straitly at her side, her whole face a lovely and loving plea.

"Please, Ban!" she said, in a voice so little that it hardly came to his ears.

Speech and motion were denied him, in the great, the incredible surprise of her presence.

"Please, Ban, forgive me." She was like a child, beseeching. Her firm little chin quivered. Two great, soft, lustrous tears welled up from the shadowy depths of the eyes and hung, gleaming, above the lashes. "Oh, aren't you going to speak to me!" she cried.

At that the bonds of his languor were rent. He leapt to her, heard the broken music of her sob, felt her arms close about him, her lips seek his and cling, loath to relinquish them even for the passionate murmurs of her love and longing for him.

"Hold me close, Ban! Don't ever let me go again! Don't ever let me doubt again!"

When, at length, she gently released herself, her foot brushed the fallen book. She picked it up tenderly, and caressed its leaves as she adjusted them.

"Didn't the Voices tell you that I'd come back, Ban?" she asked.

He shook his head. "If they did, I couldn't hear them."

"But they sang to you," she insisted gently. "They never stopped singing, did they?"

"No. No. They never stopped singing."

"Ah; then you ought to have known, Ban. And I ought to have known that you couldn't have done what I believed you had. Are you sure you forgive me, Ban?"

She told him of what she had discovered, of the talk with Russell Edmonds ("I've a letter from him for you, dearest one; he loves you, too. But not as I do. Nobody could!" interjected Io jealously), of the clue of the telegram. And he told her of Camilla Van Arsdale and the long deception; and at that, for the first time since he knew her, she broke down and gave herself up utterly to tears, as much for him as for the friend whom he had so loyally loved and served. When it was over and she had regained command of herself, she said:

"Now you must take me to her."

So once more they rode together into the murmurous peace of the forest. Io leaned in her saddle as they drew near the cabin, to lay a hand on her lover's shoulder.

"Once, a thousand years ago, Ban," she said, "when love came to me, I was a wicked little infidel and would not believe. Not in the Enchanted Canyon, nor in the Mountains of Fulfillment, nor in the Fadeless Gardens where the Undying Voices sing. Do you remember?"

"Do I not!" whispered Ban, turning to kiss the fingers that tightened on his shoulder.

"And — and I blasphemed and said there was always a serpent in every Paradise, and that Experience was a horrid hag, with a bony finger pointing to the snake.... This is my recanta-

tion, Ban. I know now that you were the true Prophet; that Experience has shining wings and eyes that can look to the future as well as the past, and immortal Hope for a lover. And that only they two can guide to the Mountains of Fulfillment. Is it enough, Ban?"

"It is enough," he answered with grave happiness.

"Listen!" exclaimed Io.

The sound of song, tender and passionate and triumphant, came pulsing through the silence to meet them as they rode on.

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
U · S · A

NEW METHOD
BOOK BINDERY